big ideas
SPECIAL ISSUE
AND EDUCATION GUIDE

High Country News

For people who care about the West

FRONTERA INCOGNITA

Revisiting the Borderlands

September 19, 2016 | $5 | Vol. 48 No. 16 | www.hcn.org

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For another story from the Borderlands, read "The Treaty of Peace and Friendship," by Tim Z. Hernandez. hcne.ws/LosGatosCanyon

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On the cover

***Quetzal*, a linocut relief print by Fernando Martí, depicts the bird flying free with no regard for border walls. Martí, a native of Ecuador, is an artist, writer and housing activist in San Francisco who creates artwork for and with many political movements for liberation. (www.justseeds.org/artists/fernandomarti)**

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High Country News

High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization that covers the issues that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the region's diverse natural and human communities.

(ISSN/0191/5657) is published bi-weekly, 22 times a year, by High Country News, 119 Grand Ave., Paonia, CO 81428. Periodicals, postage paid at Paonia, CO, and other post offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to High Country News, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428.

Subscriptions to *HCN* are $37 a year, $47 for institutions: **800-905-1155 | hcn.org**

Printed on recycled paper.

A man walks along the border in Agua Prieta, Mexico, separated from Douglas, Arizona, by a painted fence. COURTNEY PEDROZA/CRONKITE NEWS

Deming

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Editor's note

In search of a borderless West

Earlier this month, Donald Trump, the Republican nominee for U.S. president, gave a speech in Phoenix, in which he detailed his immigration policy. He repeated his frequent pledge to build a wall, the construction of which would start on "day one," he said. "We will begin working on an impenetrable physical wall on the Southern border. We will use the best technology, including above- and below-ground sensors, towers, aerial surveillance and manpower to supplement the wall, find and dislocate tunnels, and keep out the criminal cartels, and Mexico will pay for the wall."

If his words are to be believed (and who can say?), they hint at what a Trumpian America would look like: a well-armed techno-surveillance state that sharply divides "us" from "them" in the name of safety and security. Today, a Trump presidency seems unlikely, though not impossible. But whatever happens, he has done us all a service: He has held up a mirror to the American public, leaving us to make of ourselves what we will. His stances on subjects like immigration have brought to the fore many of the racial tensions in the country — particularly in the West.

Trump would have us return to a past where divisiveness and hard lines were the norm. It would be wiser, I think, to look to the future, one beyond borders. Few questions are more urgent for the American West than those related to the wholeness and integrity of the region, and our ability to confront future challenges in solidarity. Nowhere is this more true than in the Borderlands, a literal and metaphorical space that exists on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

This special issue came to fruition through the help of a guest editor, author and professor Rubén Martínez. Martínez, who was raised in Los Angeles and has Mexican and Salvadoran roots, has written extensively and personally about the subject. He sought out writing to help explain the nuances of the Borderlands, a distinct region with its own history and literature, meaning and symbolism, whose name says more about *land* than it does about borders. The fruits of his search can be found in the pages of this issue, in works of literary nonfiction, poetry and art, which Rubén introduces on page 4.

The Borderlands, as these stories show, is its own big idea, though it means different things to different people. To some, it is a frightful desert to be crossed as quickly as possible. To others, it is a place of refuge. In each story, there is a relationship at work, in a place that is rich and deep and full of meaning — and that won't be divided by some dumb wall.

—Brian Calvert, managing editor

FROM OUR WEBSITE: HCN.ORG

The disappearing pika

For years, researchers have believed that climate change may be imperiling American pikas, which live in mountainous regions and are highly sensitive to warm temperatures. A study released last month further confirms their suspicions: Of 910 once-inhabited sites that researchers looked at, many were empty of the tiny lagomorphs. **ANNA V. SMITH** MORE: hcne.ws/pika-at-risk

An American pika gathers vegetation for its hay pile. WILL THOMPSON/USGS

$1 billion

projected cost of the Grand Canyon Escalade, a development that may go through despite the election of Russell Begaye, who opposes the project, as Navajo Nation president.

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number of votes needed, out of 24, for the Navajo Nation Council to overturn a presidential veto.

The Grand Canyon is the site of frequent development proposals, including a tram to Navajo land at the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers. A bill introduced in the Navajo Nation Council would approve the tram, despite opposition from the nation's president, environmentalists and other tribes, setting up a potential legal battle. **KRISTA LANGLOIS** MORE: hcne.ws/GCdevelopment

California bans new coal exports

In late August, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill prohibiting the California Transportation Commission from funding new coal exports, cutting coal from Oakland's massive new import and export hub. The exports had drawn opposition for their possible health effects on the community. California's ban is one of several recent West Coast rulings blocking the struggling coal industry, and proponents say it will curtail coal exports and push renewable energy forward. **PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER** MORE: hcne.ws/coal-exports

The new Oakland Bulk and Oversized Terminal in California won't be shipping coal when it opens in 2018. WIKICOMMONS

An introduction to the Borderlands

BY RUBÉN MARTÍNEZ

Everything moves across lines here: human desire and solidarity and jealousies petty and big, jaguars and grasshoppers.

In August, we did our part as a family and visited a national park on the 100th anniversary of our nation's "best idea." We'd made our annual pilgrimage to New Mexico to visit my wife Angela's family in Albuquerque, and instead of taking one of our usual outings north towards Santa Fe and beyond, we headed in the opposite direction, to one of the more remote parks in the country, Carlsbad Caverns. Angela had stirring memories of her own childhood trip — the fantastic formations emerging from the darkness, the spectacle of bats spiraling into the sky at dusk. Now she would usher me and our twin 9-year-old daughters, Ruby and Lucía, into the depths.

We took the long drive south from Albuquerque through sharply contrasting landscapes: the gypsum flats, which inevitably brought to mind the original ground zero at Alamogordo, 71 summers ago; the lyrical shapes and blues of distant mountains rising from the desert floor. We blew through Roswell's alien kitsch and arrived as the white light and heat were peaking. We were surprised to find the parking lot jammed: It's about five hours from Albuquerque and three from El Paso, so you really have to want to get here. The rangers told us that the wait time to take the elevator back up was at least two hours. They recommended that we take the elevator down (*no wait!*) and then walk up the 750 feet of steep switchbacks to emerge from the natural entrance of the caverns.

And so we did. At the first sight of the speleothems — the columns, stalagmites and stalactites — I was stunned speechless, seeing them with Angela's child-eyes and those of our own children. Forms that resisted naming (and thus have been tagged with childish descriptors like "popcorn," "Swiss cheese") drew us in with their overpowering strangeness. I have poor vision, especially in the dark, so it took quite some time for the formations to fully materialize, and as they did, so did the humans around me — and, unexpectedly, their differences. An African-American kid half-jogging through with a backpack and earbuds. A group of what I took to be Pakistani women wearing hijabs. Plenty of European and Asian tourists, of course; I heard German, French, Japanese. And the Mexicans, or Mexican-Americans. A lot of them. From what I could hear in snatches of conversation, most sounded like they were from Chihuahua, where the regional accent softens "ch" almost into a "sh." They wore the uniform of the rural Mexican family: dad in baseball cap, untucked pearl-button plaid and boots, and everyone else in T-shirts and jeans and sneakers.

This was not the crowd I was expecting. I'd been to Joshua Tree National Park earlier in the summer, and to Yosemite not long ago. The demographics there were in line with surveys the National Park Service itself has conducted, showing a dearth of diversity among visitors, owing to our schisms of race and class. America's best idea is subject to all the divisions of our current national reckoning as the Dis-United States of America. (There is no demographic breakdown for Carlsbad specifically, but I was told by staff that its proximity to El Paso/Juárez undoubtedly accounts for its mix of visitors.) We'd all come together in the Big Room at Carlsbad, and it seemed that our best idea was, at the very least, salvageable.

WE WERE IN THE BORDERLANDS, literally and figuratively. Near the state line with Texas (which meant there was also a fair amount of Ford F-150s in the parking lot and, as we refer to them in our family, the sometimes "scary white people" that owned them), and near the frontier with Mexico. The region that comprises northern Mexico and the Southwestern United States is a social ecotone writ large. Latinos, whites and Native Americans predominate, but there are significant African-American and Asian-American populations, too — and every mixed shade we can humanly derive therefrom.

Take a look at a map that charts "multiple race" prevalence and notice the swath of color over the Borderlands — and how it resembles the blue-red divide of our political geography. The diversity extends to the flora and fauna, climate and geology of the four great deserts (Mojave, Great Basin, Sonoran, Chihuahuan) that delight in disregarding human demarcations, and to the fuzzy transition zones between them. Forested sky islands and infernal playas. Singing sand dunes where bunchgrasses miraculously sprout and effusive riparian areas along the rivers that are regarded as sacred by indigenous tradition and that are profaned by our (over) development schemes.

Everything moves across lines here: human desire and solidarity and jealousies petty and big, jaguars and grasshoppers. The headwaters of the San Pedro River gather on Cananea Mountain in Sonora, and the flow breaches the border, coming northward about 80 miles into Arizona. The Secure Fence Act of 2006 mandated fencing right where the San Pedro crosses the line, but not even the Army Corps of Engineers could figure a way to stop the river. I've never heard of the Border Patrol attempting to apprehend and deport the water.

Of course, the Borderlands are a place of great contradiction and conflict as well.

Bats emerge from the caves at Carlsbad Caverns National Park into the New Mexico sunset. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The bloodshed of the misnamed "Drug War" in Mexico and Central America reaches us on this side, in the seldom-told story of families that suffer largely in silence when a loved one is kidnapped or disappeared back home because there is simply no law enforcement authority they can trust — here or there. Racial tensions date back to the "cycles of conquest" across several centuries by Spaniards and Americans. These lands are haunted by traumatic history. When you look across the "empty" basin towards the range in the distance, you are looking at the stage upon which unspeakable violence occurred and continues to have an impact (in different ways) on the descendants of the Native populations. With that knowledge, it is impossible not to sense an uneasy melancholy settling on the view.

And so this special issue of *High Country News*. It's a homecoming for me, since I moved outside the traditional geographical boundaries of the Borderlands a decade ago. Although I could easily say that in their demographic and cultural unity and divisiveness, Los Angeles and Oakland, the two cities I call home today, are firmly in the Borderlands as well. Just as is the small town of Victor, Idaho, which saw its "Hispanic or Latino" population more than double between 2000 and 2010, mostly due to the availability of immigrant-friendly service-sector jobs in the resort town of Jackson, Wyoming, less than an hour's drive away.

I've known some of these writers for decades, others for a few months. I sought to gather voices with contrasting passions, vantage points, and experiences of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Taken together, their stories form an integrated geography that will ideally give you a sense of land and climate, the human and the animal, history and culture and politics — and how these are all inseparable. As we face the greatest test to our species and all species in climate change, we also confront the challenge of difference itself. If we allow destructive differences to continue dividing us, there will be nothing left to fight for.

AFTER A COUPLE OF HOURS in the caverns, we maneuvered the steep switchbacks up toward the surface. Imperceptibly at first, we began entering the "twilight zone," the farthest reach of light from the natural entrance, the huge eye-shaped gap in the limestone that gradually came into view. We returned to the heat and light and yucca spikes of the Chihuahuan Desert, aware now that every step along the ground is above a great world below.

Now we just had to wait for the bats. Perfectly cast for the Borderlands, they are called Mexicans: Mexican free-tailed bats. The amphitheater that looks down upon the great eye in the limestone filled up with the same motley cohort we'd been shoulder to shoulder with below. A Park Service ranger explained how the cave "breathes" to maintain fresh air, and told us that the first 15 minutes of life is a time when sight (bats are not blind!) and touch and smell bond mother and bat pups so intimately that they can find each other amid the half-million other bats in the colony.

The pups are born here, and as soon as they are old enough to fly, the colony migrates south, to Mexico. Angela whispered to me that surely a Trump supporter was going to complain about "anchor babies." Get Trump, the great builder of beautiful walls, to erect a thousand-mile aerial screen to catch alien bat traffic!

I was expecting the sky to grow black with bats, like a plague of locusts. What emerged was much subtler, and sublime. My eye caught sight of a single bat — at a distance of 50 yards, a modest gray fleck against the dark of the cave, its wings beating rapidly but not so fast I couldn't make out discrete movements. It drew a big graceful arc above the mouth. And now another bat and another and another, now dozens, hundreds, formed a cyclone that expanded as it ascended, flying counterclockwise, gathering momentum. Then suddenly the group hurled itself eastward, towards the river for its first drink.

For several minutes, the audience — that great American crew of difference — sat utterly quiet, transfixed by the spectacle. Ruby and Lucía were having a moment; I could tell, because they didn't say a word. We were stunned into silence by a life alien to us, yet one that we sensed a deep connection to. Our differences — the borders within our species and the borders among species — didn't disappear in the dark of the caverns. But for a few moments, those differences interwove, gathered in a cyclonic updraft, in the great arc of life, and we followed its flight into the dark.

Welcome to the Borderlands. □

The San Pedro River runs below the fence at the U.S.-Mexico border near Hereford, Arizona. NORMA JEAN GARGASZ/ ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A Mexican migrant child sits on a bus at the San Ysidro port of entry on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border, moments before being transported to a shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, left. A commercial fisherman weathers a storm, right. GUILLERMO ARIAS/ZUMA, LEFT; SCOTT DICKERSON/GETTY IMAGES, RIGHT

The wall and the gray zone

On borders, north and south

BY ALISON HAWTHORNE DEMING

I have lived in the Southwestern Borderlands for 26 years, moving away from 10 generations of ancestry in New England to further my North American education as a resident of Tucson. I was hired to be director of the University of Arizona's Poetry Center, so I brought my passion for the transformative power of language and the small revolutions of the soul — my hopes for the larger evolution of the common good that poetry can induce. I knew I had a lot to learn about my adopted region and that I would be learning from the more diverse range of cultures here.

It does not take a newcomer long to realize that the humanitarian crisis of the Borderlands outweighs the security challenges. Beyond the heated bombast about the dangers of undocumented immigrants lie endless stories of hardship, conflict, suffering and death along the 2,000-mile border the U.S. shares with Mexico. I find myself hungry for stories of compassion in this political season when meanness, mendacity and avarice are touted as if they are virtues. One might think that our much-lauded democratic values are insignificant or a scam, judging from the empathy-deficit behaviors on display. But democracy must always be all about the people, and, as Pablo Neruda wrote, the poet must always be on the side of the oppressed.

The call for social justice was planted in me as a teenager: Henry Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" and James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. In the Borderlands, I have been educated by stories brought to me by students, friends and colleagues.

Ofelia Zepeda writes in her poem "Birth Witness" of being a Tohono O'odham woman born in a cotton field, her parents illiterate in the English language. She is required by the state to provide proof of her birth — to offer witness, documentation. "The stars were there," she writes. "The wind was there. … The pollen of spring was floating and sensed me being born." This is not the language of the state. "You need records," says the agency official. But the poem is a more profound document of witness.

Francisco Cantú writes in his essay "Bajadas" of his work as a Border Patrol agent who must tend to the body of a migrant dead from dehydration and exposure. It's the first of many encounters that will teach him how far we have to go in dealing with the humanitarian crisis on the border.

My students wrote about families who have straddled the border towns for generations, running the local department store or the molino for grinding corn for tamales, who find themselves suddenly challenged as suspects or "aliens." One young woman wrote about taking up with a drug dealer, who gave her a Glock and taught her how to use it because she "might need to." She had seen too many deaths on the streets from gang shootings to count. I hoped every week that I would see her back in class, and I hope now she has found her way to safety.

Then there are the families, broken apart by border policy; no regulation will keep them from risking whatever it takes to become unified again. The border, writes Gloria Anzaldúa, is an open wound "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture." The border is stained with suffering and bluster and family histories. It is a zone of conflict, a place where U.S. appetites — for drugs, cheap food, cheap houses — feed violence and injustice. And the border is home for families who have known it as home since before Arizona became a state in 1912. The line that defines the border geographically may be clear on maps and at walled border crossings, but the cultural border is permeable, like a cell membrane, and no wall can keep exchanges from occurring across the line in the sand.

When I was 8, growing up in rural Connecticut, my parents bought a fisherman's cottage on the island of Grand Manan in New Brunswick, Canada. For over 60 years, I have crossed the peaceful border from the U.S. into


A U.S. Border Patrol vehicle through the border fence in Tijuana, Mexico, left. The United States and Mexico share 1,989 miles of common border, and about 650 miles of it is fenced. The United States and Canada share 5,525 miles of common border, some separated by a space in the trees, right. GUILLERMO ARIAS/ZUMA, LEFT; MARK STEVENS/CC FLICKR, RIGHT

Canada to spend summers in this fishing community of 2,500 residents, descendants of Loyalists who left the U.S. at the time of the Revolutionary War and built a new identity based on the terms set by the fearsome tides of the Bay of Fundy. The island became the sardine capital of the world in the late 1800s, at no small cost to the families who worked the North Atlantic for its bounty. Commercial fishing is the riskiest occupation in the world, and fishermen are rugged and nonchalant in facing the risks. "If you don't like the water, don't work on it," one stalwart fisherman said after being rescued from his burning boat. Then he promptly geared up to head back out. The man who built our cottage in 1864 had a son who was lost at sea for a week, adrift in his dory after the mother ship was lost in a storm. He was rescued; five other island men drowned.

A new monument to fishermen from the counties of Washington, Maine and Charlotte, New Brunswick, who have been lost in the region since 1900 went up this summer in Lubec, Maine. The monument sits on state land and was locally funded by yard sales, golf tournaments, potlucks and bottle drives: a wave-form wall engraved with names of fishermen who died at sea "in pursuit of their livelihood." Two storm waves rise to form a wall of water engulfing the lost. It is a wall of shared mourning intended to unify families on both sides of the North Atlantic border. This is not a wall of exclusion but a wall of inclusion.

Hiking along the edge of rugged basalt cliffs on the western side of the island, I can see the blue haze of the mainland across the Grand Manan Channel. This is a Canadian island, though it lies only 10 miles off the coast of Maine. In the waters between us and them is an area known locally as the gray zone. No one knows precisely where the border lies. Or if they do, the local patterns of use allow the line to remain murky. U.S. and Canadian lobstermen both work the water. Jurisdiction is unclear and hostility is not unknown. Fishermen cut one another's lines, or lay traps on top of their competitors', or — in the most hostile takeovers — steal another fisherman's take. It's a zone of tension and competition. But no armed border. No wall.

Machias Seal Island, a rocky outcrop lying at the southern stretch of the gray zone, is a sanctuary for pelagic birds — puffins, arctic terns, razorbills — that come off the sea only during their breeding time. I like the birds' approach to borders: *Who cares? This is a good place to raise our young.* But that's the naturalist's perpetual naiveté, giving oneself over repeatedly to the wonder and love of Earth's bounty. Why can't we all get along? After all, life is a gift, suffering is real, and the day is here to be savored and shared with loved ones.

The natural world always challenges any human notions of borders. Never has that been more profoundly true than now, when the science of climate change tells us with utter certainty that we are heating the planet to a degree that threatens the future of our fellow creatures, as well as our own way of life. Climate change is a fact. We know enough to act, given the will. Many borders continue to bleed, but when it comes to climate change, we live now in a borderless world, sharing a common fate, a unifying cause. That cause just might be the sanctuary that saves us from the plunder of democracy, the plunder of Earth, the plunder of the future.

As of mid-June this fiscal year, the U.S. Border Patrol had apprehended nearly 43,000 unaccompanied children from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico on the U.S.-Mexico border. The official acronym for them is "UAC," Unaccompanied Alien Children. I can't bring myself to call them aliens. That's a little too Area 51 for me, and these children are very much from our own beleaguered planet. They have made a frightful journey lasting weeks, seeking refuge from violence, drug wars and intolerable living conditions.

This is a fact: nearly 43,000 children. I find myself hungry for facts in this political season dominated by the dangerously unhinged, disdainful and vindictive Donald Trump. At his rallies, the mob chants, "Build a wall — kill them all." Are these children the ones they have in mind? No. The Trumpsters have given their minds over to a torrent of rage in which facts are irrelevant.

The wall is a metaphor, of course, one that embodies the longing for safety, though what threatens the lives of most Americans has nothing to do with the U.S.-Mexico border. We are more likely to be killed by an open-carry nutcase or drunk driver than an unaccompanied child crossing the border. We don't need a wall. We need a renewal of values, American values that dictate that the hardship, suffering and death of others, or the peril to the planet, are a call to the moral imagination, a call that we dare not refuse to answer. □

And the woman fled into the desert,

there to be cared for, for 1,260 days,
in a place which God had prepared for her.

—Revelation 12:6

BY ANA CASTILLO

It is over a decade since I left Chicago to live in the Chihuahuan Desert.

My home sits on a mesa. From the mistress bedroom, windows facing east, I have a view of the Franklin Mountains. The Franklins comprise a small range that extends from the state line of New Mexico through El Paso, Texas. They may well be over a billion years old.

Sitting on my bed, laptop propped, I have watched those low mountains throughout entire days, from sunrise to sunset, during heavy rains, obscured by dust storms, and throughout many clear days. As the mesa declines, there are the verdant crops of small farms in summer and, farthest below, the town of Anthony. It serves as the dividing line between New Mexico and Texas. To the south is El Paso and to the north are the colonias — villages that lead to Las Cruces.

Before the few pine trees around the house were nearly all annihilated by blight, there was a symphony of birds' songs from dawn until dusk. When I had more trees, I watched the myriad of birds headed to nest and settle in for the night. The same chickadee woke me each day before sunrise. And throughout the day, chirps did indeed fill my heart with song. The light of the desert accompanies me, too. There's nothing like it. In summer, so bright and combined with the heat, however, the sun makes you feel as if you've had your eyelids peeled back. I swear there is such a thing as eyeball burn. But mostly the light seems to play tricks on you. See the way it hits the wall there? See how it has changed the room since the morning? Outdoors, all of desert nature is in high relief. Periodically, you can hear the whistle of the Rio Grande and El Paso Railroad Co. trains rumbling through at a distance.

One warm night I was driving up the mesa to my casita. Suddenly my eye caught the shimmering of small lights out on a field, like a slow flurry of large fireflies. Along the dirt road, old cars were parked. Here and there a woman stood outside rocking a child. It was onion-picking season. Because of the excruciating heat, people were hired to work at night. The fireflies were miners' lights strapped around their foreheads. At night, milder temperatures eased the backbreaking repetitive effort of pulling onions out of the earth, though you might also run across a rattler, scorpion, spider or other nighttime prowler.

Although before this recent life I was mostly a city dweller, I do have early memories that were triggered by those field workers. My mother's younger sister was widowed very young. Tía Flora was born in Mexico City but moved near the border of Laredo and lived in Nuevo Laredo in her late teens, joining my mother and their grandparents, who had migrated earlier. The sisters were orphans. My aunt's second husband, a card-carrying Tejano, came from a farmworker family. They migrated throughout the year following the crops. Every summer they made it to Indiana, which is close to Chicago, where I am from, and they stayed in the labor camp. From the visits we paid

***Balance*, above, shows a connection between humans and other lifeforms on *The World Wall*, a travelling mural installation.** JUDITH BACA

to see my Tía Flora's in-laws in summer during tomato season in Indiana, I vividly recall the conditions that Mexicans and American Mexicans experienced in the camps. While picking the fruits and vegetables that would stock grocery shelves and would be sent to canneries (where more Mexicans worked) and eventually reached American tables, the workers existed in squalor.

I don't like to think of those labor-camp visits. Although I was just a kid, una escuincle of 6 or 8 years of age, not knowing anything from anything else, growing up in a deteriorated neighborhood in Chicago that was about to get torn down, I knew the place that family was staying in was perpetually dark. It was a scary, dismal place for a child. A bulb hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room. I don't recollect any windows. There was no refrigeration and no outlets for fans. Maybe six adults slept in that room. In Chicago, in our flat, we had big rats that chased the housecat. Sometimes kerosene ran out on winter nights and we slept with layers of clothes on, but the labor camp brought Mexican daily life to a different dimension.

At the labor camp, as opposed to the ranch house, there was no doubt it was a Mexican world. Perhaps there was a hot plate for the doña's tortilla-making, my tía's traveling mother-in-law. As for running water, I remember a large communal something that in my mind's faded memory looks like a trough. In my head, I hear people laughing at that trough as they come with their bushels of picked tomatoes.

The workers were paid by the bushel. Children were paid less than adults for the same bushel. I see the sun-grazed faces of brown children, the faces of my older half-siblings among them. My mother sent them, around 11 or 13 years old, to work for a few weeks in summer. Instead of going away to summer camp for free with Jane Addams' Hull House, they were picking fruit for a few cents a bushel.

I set upon a novel (eventually it became *Give It to Me*) to restore humor to my soul. With the startling red-orange sun making its ritual descent behind the flat horizon each night, while below in town twinkling lights went on in the Escándalo Night Club, I stayed at my computer and tried to find the funny in living. While I worked hard at writing humor, my life was not funny, not even in the ironic way one might say, "Funny, you should say that. …"

To begin with, Mi'jo, several years out of college, was in jail. Since I had a cousin who served a sentence of 21 years, the two-year penalty my son received seemed merciful to a mother's heart. That summer, midway through his incarceration, it felt like 21 years.

In the evenings, after a day's work, I took advantage of the government-granted privilege of communication and sent my only child long electronic missives. I could write to him as much and as often as I wanted and not have to wait long for a response. Moreover, I could tell him everything that was on my mind. The emails were being read, of course, but what did a brokenhearted mother have to hide? With utter self-indulgence, I didn't hold back the hurt, confusion, and anger I'd had over his decisions. All the ranting may have done little to brighten my son's days, but it became a kind of release for me before bed.

At times, my son's and my exchanges were not fraught with futile regrets or reproaches but filled with discussions about writing, books and music. From prison he began to write for my new arts and literary zine, *La Tolteca*. He won a writing award from PEN designated for the incarcerated. It wouldn't go on his résumé later on — he had enough going against him with a record — but a writer getting an award from PEN is worth noting. He was in his own hell that summer. The inescapable heat and loneliness and the anguish of my son's nonsensical loss of freedom meant I was in a purgatory of my own.

That summer, I stayed at my desk until late when sleep finally came to me. Mi'jo's incarceration, for unarmed robbery, tormented me, and I thought a lot about the bizarre 10-year journey of Odysseus while his mother dwelled as a shadow in Hades.

My understanding of the story of *The Odyssey* is limited. (Unlike my son, who read Homer in high school, I graduated from a secretarial school for girls that stressed typing speed above all else.) I have no formal studies in the classics. Nevertheless, from a rudimentary understanding, the story of Odysseus, like most mythology, intrigued me.

My son was no hero, to be sure. He was born to no throne. Nevertheless, I would hang in there and wait out his absence.

Anticlea, the mother of Odysseus, gave up on her son's return from the Trojan War; she died of grief. My son was no hero, to be sure. He was born to no throne. Nevertheless, I would hang in there and wait out his absence.

In myths, I have searched for the cultural seeds that make up men, women and other wondrous creatures. In reading the story of Odysseus, I tried to understand how in every journey a man or woman was both hero and anti-hero at varying times.

Years before, I taught a feminist class at a university using Joseph Campbell's model of the hero's journey to becoming savior or king. It was dismaying or perhaps, in the end, challenging, that I had to adjust women's history on such a journey. Women did not share the linear narrative to leader (or failed potential leader). Instead, female archetypes had three life stages: lovely maiden, fertile mother, and (sterile, hunchbacked, saggy, wild-haired, banished-from-the-village-to-a-hut-where-she-concocted-poisons-to-harm-men-unworthy-of-love-although-wise-and-yet-despised-for-her-wisdom) crone. Me, in other words.

Looking around, there I was, living

Ana Castillo is reunited with her son. COURTESY ANA CASTILLO

in isolation at the edge of the world, which is what desert, sea and sky have been to us for ages. I didn't concoct spells like the village witch, but I did enjoy cool herbal tea. As for the bad body image older women were presented with in myths and fairy tales, I swam every day, rode horseback, and was on a dark green veggie-juice diet. I was not entirely

There I was, living in isolation at the edge of the world, which is what desert, sea and sky have been to us for ages.

something out of Grimm's fairy tales. Nevertheless, the role of mothers in myth (and now for me in reality), which seemed to be standing on the sidelines, wringing our hands watching the lives of grown children unfold, seemed unavoidable.

Anticlea got very little time in the imagination of the patriarchs. In *The Odyssey*, she has died — but not of old age or illness. It is speculated by some that she took her own life after being told the lie that her son was dead. I sympathized.

There were instances during that period when patriarchy no less affected me. To begin with, when a child fails, at any stage, in any way, eyes turn to the mother. The chorus (certain family members, immediate community, society in general), with few exceptions, appeared to point fingers at me, as if to demand my banishment. After all, to me had been left the duty to produce a king or a hero. I imagined the whispers — what more could anyone expect from a woman who left a husband and who, furthermore, behaved as if she had no use for men? How dare she think she could walk about and be as liberated as any man? No wonder her son turned out such a disappointment. What male role model had he had? These toxic thoughts echoed in my skull the whole of his incarceration.

When I wasn't sensing that others blamed me, I blamed myself.

There are military surveillance planes from the White Sands Missile Range or Fort Bliss that fly overhead occasionally, intruding on the isolation. When the mares of my modest (near-barren) ranchito are let out of their corral, there is nothing more exciting than the sounds of their hooves against the sandy floor as they run free. Sometimes winds carry the yells of the neighbors playing basketball; I hear the *thump-thump* of dribbling and the banter of boys becoming men. There used to be a small grove of pecan trees next door to me. The tree keepers who resided in a trailer on that land would every now and then raise a ruckus with a family party. Mexican banda or norteño music played. Kids shouted from an inflatable bounce house, drunk male voices carried over, everything blaring against the stark light of the desert until dark. Disrupting my peace and the illusion that there I was free from gauche society, it all used to annoy me. Then the lovely grove went dry — the drought. The family moved out and their decrepit trailer was razed. Now, when I think of it all, I miss the vitality of those families; they lived unfettered by pretenses. I don't miss their dogs.

The stark light fades to black slowly, leaving in its wake dogs barking and the occasional howling of coyotes. The dogs lie about all day, and after dark join the canine choir throughout the mesa. In winter (a winter that seems to grow longer and colder each year), they come inside and throw themselves down in front of the wood-burning stove in the living room. If permitted by the smallest one that sleeps with me, they sneak into my bedroom and loll around the bed. We all listen to the barking of less fortunate dogs left outside and howling coyotes until we go to sleep in the lonesome quiet of the desert. □

Excerpted from
Black Dove: Mamá, Mi'jo, and Me
The Feminist Press at CUNY
(May 10, 2016) $16.95

Generations of women hold candles, depicting the beginning of a society's movement toward peace, in a painting titled *Triumph of the Hearts*. JUDITH BACA

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Continued on next page

KATHY BOGAN

High Country News *founder, Tom Bell, passes*

On Aug. 30, 2016, Tom Bell, the founder of *High Country News*, passed away in his hometown of Lander, Wyoming. He was 92.

Tom's life and work inspired generations of Western conservationists and writers. I am lucky to be one of them.

A few years ago, on a road trip from Colorado to Montana, my then-teenage son and I stopped in Lander to visit him. I'm not sure Zachary knew what to expect: As we pulled into town, he reminded me that, when he was young, I used to tell him that Tom Bell rode around Wyoming on the back of a pronghorn, hell-bent on saving the West.

But something about Tom inspired tall tales like that. His achievements are legendary – he founded both *HCN* and the Wyoming Outdoor Council, years after losing an eye to German flak during a World War II bombing mission. His fiery personality was equally legendary, displayed in decades of heated battles with governors, agencies, industries and fellow ranchers.

"Sorry to say to my detractors, so long as I live, I will continue to call the shots as I see them," Tom, who was the son of a coal miner and a rancher himself, wrote in a 1973 editorial. "I have been a maverick and a gadfly all my life, and like many Wyomingites, I am too old to change now."

Tom's integrity was unbreakable. And it meant that he had remarkable influence. As former *HCN* publisher Ed Marston put it in a 1995 column: "If I were a consultant to the West's energy and mineral companies and ranchers, and to their politicians and bureaucrats, I would give them one piece of advice: 'Don't get crosswise with Tom Bell. Early on in your "process," tell Tom your plans. If he reacts with a strong no, change them. It will save you lots of time, money and head-scratching.' "

Tom's feistiness was accompanied, as he aged, by an ever-darkening worldview, which might seem odd for a man who has so positively influenced others. But, as former *HCN* Senior Editor Ray Ring pointed out in a 2010 profile, he reflected an environmental movement that is no stranger to the tango between "we-can-make-it-happen" and "we're-all-doomed."

As Zachary and I sipped strong coffee at his kitchen table, Tom handed us articles and books, filled with underlined passages and scribbled notes in the margins, confirming humanity's dismal path toward destruction. Fixing Zachary with his one bright blue eye, he said: "I'm afraid we are leaving your generation with the biggest problems humanity has ever faced."

This was not exactly the uplifting message a father might want his son to hear as he launches into adulthood. But it was a true and necessary one, and one that Tom was able to share with others, primarily because of the man he was. He had a rare and gentle soulfulness; I think it might be his biggest contribution to this ephemeral world. I'll never forget the candid chats we had bunking together at a 2003 *HCN* board meeting at the Murie Center in Grand Teton National Park. Somewhere in the absolute darkness of that musty cabin, as we talked about the potential brightness of the future, Tom's fierce, humble spirit latched on to me. I left ready to tackle whatever challenges life might throw my way. I know many others who knew Tom had similar transformative experiences.

Tom was a great man who will be greatly missed. As a farewell, we'd like to share a column that he wrote 46 years ago for the Aug. 28, 1970, issue of *High Country News* *(see page 13)*. Bless you, Tom Bell.

–Paul Larmer, executive director and publisher, for the staff

Paul Larmer and Tom Bell in 2003 in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming. HCN FILE PHOTO

WEB EXTRA For more writings by and about Tom Bell, see **hcne.ws/Tom-Bell**

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2—High Country News
Friday, August 28, 1970

HIGH COUNTRY

By Tom Bell

The days shorten. Hills turn sere and brown. Dried cases of the stonefly stick lifelessly to the exposed boulders; streams once brimming now flow low and clear. And flocks of birds are all too evident. The cycle of life turns slowly but irrevocably.

As seasons swing, I suppose it is only natural that our thoughts turn inward and back. The promises of spring and the fulfillments of summer pass in review. Happy times and sore times have come and gone, those particular ones never to come again.

So, too, the memories of youth return on occasion to bring the warmth of old friendships remembered and old experiences renewed. Some of my fondest memories are of the dog days of August. Then much of the ranch work was done and cares slipped away. School was in the offing but far enough away to leave free time. And even after school hours, there was still time to slip away and meditate beside some branch of the river — a retreat unsurpassed even yet in my mind's eye.

It was during those days that we often fished. Two boys and a girl, a boy and a girl, two boys, and on many occasions — a boy. Whether together or alone, the memories recalled are always pleasant.

We caught fish, sometimes excitedly, but mostly we just fished. It didn't really matter. They were the pleasant hours when teenage cares could be temporarily submersed.

Teen years are tortured times. I suppose they always have been and always will be. I don't know how I might have fared in this world had I not had the great outdoors in which to roam, seek solace, heal sensitive feelings, and begin to grope my way to adulthood. I grieve that all young people cannot experience the lessons the Good Lord can teach under His blue canopy, beside some soothing brook.

Fishing was one of my releases. But even more than fishing was the chance to be along amongst nature's constant wonders. I climbed trees and onto the overhanging branches of the stream below. There, I could watch the trout rise to the flies, or languidly hold their place in the clear waters. The beauty and the symmetry of the fish were sights to behold.

As golden leaves rustled loose from their moorings and floated down upon the water, I watched the brown trout seek their redds and there enact the ritual of life itself. And there came the wonder of how it must be between man and woman.

I fished with rod or I fished with my hands as the urge struck. If I tackled them, it was only the biggest ones and then only one, for I searched the deep holes beneath driftwood piles for the lunkers. Sometimes I closed upon the great body and then relaxed to let him pass his way.

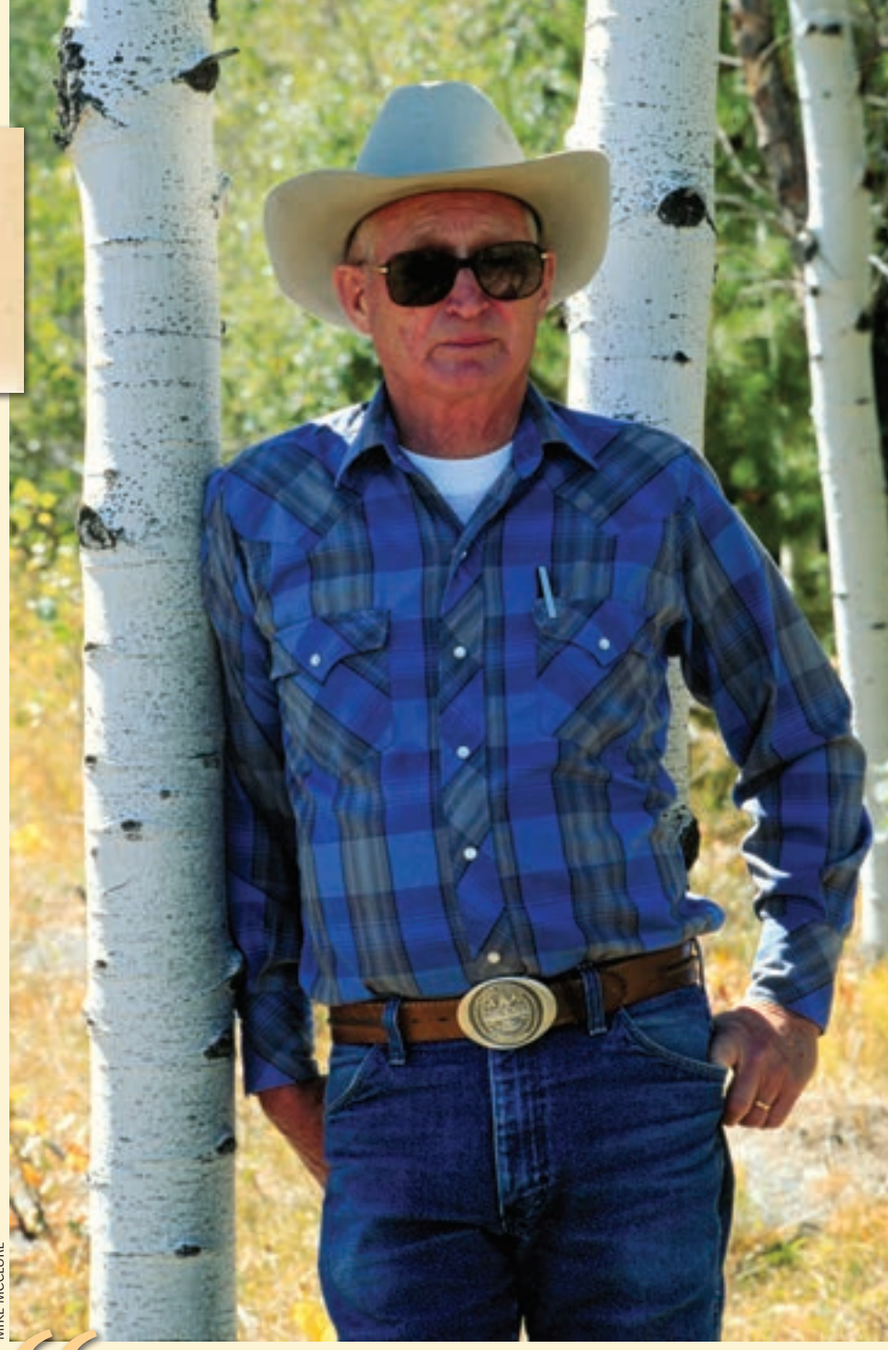
I could exalt in the triumph of a prize catch. And yet felt compassion for the fallen — for a lifeless bit which would no more rise to a shimmering fly.

Amongst these many experiences, whether alone far back in the mountains or lying quietly beside a still pool, I found myself. I could come to grips with life itself. And in doing so, I found my own niche in life.

My lot has been cast with the simple wonders of the world. You cannot buy the light flashing from a rainbow's side in limpid waters. There is no price on the hoot of an owl from dusky woods at eventide. You can only experience a coyote by hearing his howl.

For so long as I live, I will prize the simple pleasures I learned as a boy above all material goods. Money could never buy the happiness and contentment which I experience afield. My own sons can experience these things. But how about my grandsons? Will the world become so crowded that they, or their grandsons, be deprived of fulfilling experiences? How can our affluent, burgeoning society continue on its way without destroying values which cannot be bought in the marketplace?

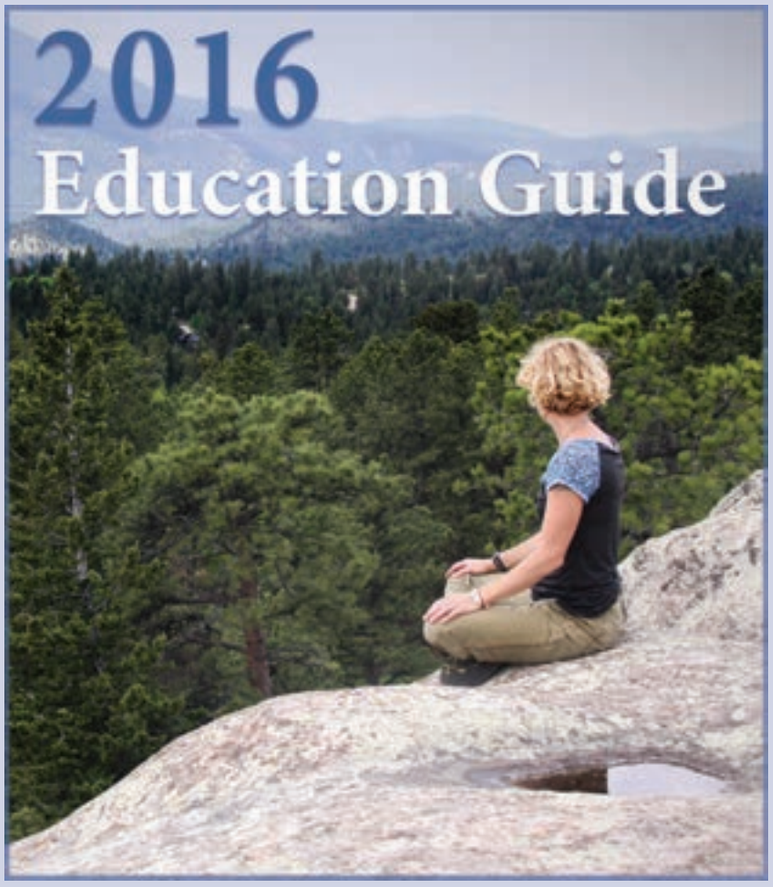
I suppose it's these apprehensions which motivate my waking moments. I would have it no other way. But I wish I could assure myself and them. □



MIKE MCCLURE

"In such moments of vulnerability, ambivalence and detachment from one another, we must choose: Do we get involved with saving something bigger than ourselves or do we remain silent and watch it slowly disappear?"

—Tom Bell, founder of *High Country News*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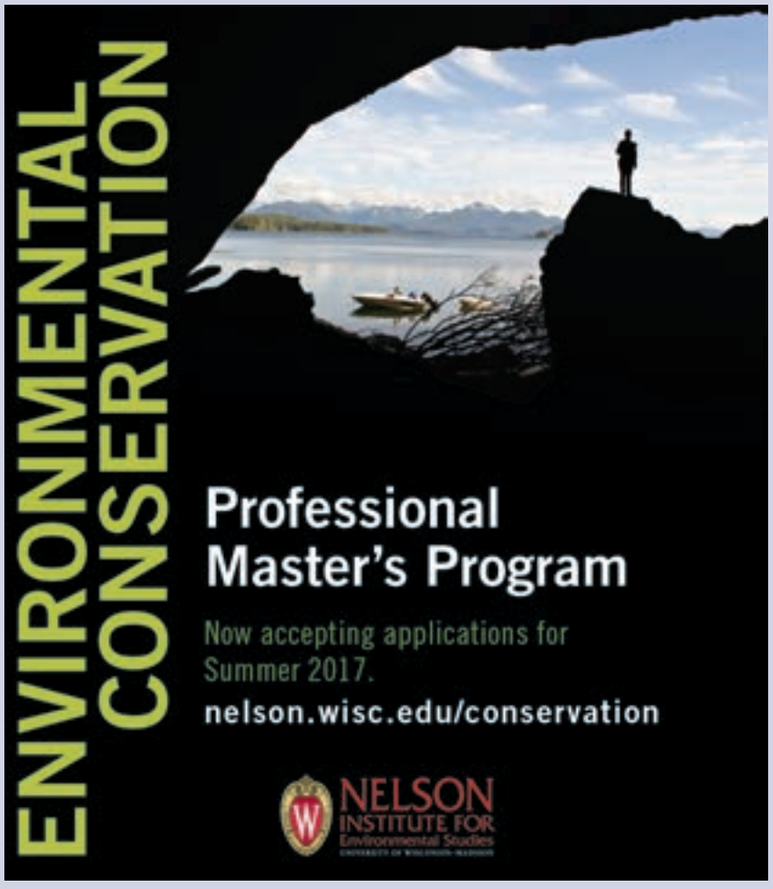
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Borderland Education Programs

In this globalized world, international migration and immigration is an increasingly important and controversial area of study. In 2013, a federal judge upheld a law passed by the Arizona Legislature in 2010 banning the Mexican-American studies program taught in Tucson's public schools. The bill's supporters had argued that the classes "promoted resentment" by teaching students about their heritage — an important issue in Arizona, where an estimated 10 percent of pupils in public schools have at least one parent who is an undocumented immigrant. The University of New Mexico's Chicano Program (*listed on page 21*) called the bill "dangerous and divisive," saying that such laws "undermine the dialogue that is necessary to address our nation's racial, ethnic, and immigration issues."

A number of universities, especially those in border states like Arizona, New Mexico and California, have programs that examine the influx of people who bring cultural, economic and social changes to their new homes, as well as the bureaucratic structures and policies that impact their lives, for better or worse. The programs, law clinics and research centers listed here study *immigration*, or the act of coming to another country to live there permanently, as well as *migration*, defined as the movement from one country or place to another. The subjects studied range from law and policy to Chicana feminism, arts and culture to race and ethnicity studies, all of which are important threads in the fabric of immigration and migration studies. ANNA V. SMITH

Arizona

Law clinics give college students real-world legal experience under a mentor's supervision. Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law in Tempe, Arizona, holds an Immigration Law and Policy Clinic that provides immigration services for foster children in need. The clinic, which partners with community advocates, local nonprofits and government agencies, focuses on providing on-the-ground legal assistance, including immigration petitions for "special juvenile status" and naturalization processes for foster children adopted by U.S. citizens. Clinic participants write legal correspondence, represent foster children during immigration proceedings, and interview and prepare experts and witnesses for cases.

Professor Evelyn Cruz, director of the Immigration Clinic at Arizona State University, teaches students how to work with clients and track cases.
COURTESY SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR COLLEGE OF LAW

For students looking to study immigration outside of law and policy, the University of Arizona's Mexican American Studies includes immigration in its interdisciplinary research program for doctoral students, as well as migration studies in its master of science curriculum. The Ph.D. in Mexican American studies allows for an individualized study plan, in which students examine a blend of topics, including gender, health, immigration, indigenous and historical studies, just to name a few. Ph.D. students work with other departments to formulate their own studies to complete their degree requirements. Students interested in the master's program can choose from three major pillars: historical and cultural studies, Latina/o health and wellness, and migration studies. For those

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in migration studies, courses zero in on the background of policies that affect Mexican Americans and the places they live. The University of Arizona in Tucson also has an immigration policy program through the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, which "aims to illuminate the complexities of immigration in a global economy."

Students seeking more flexibility in curriculum and programs can look to Prescott College in Prescott, Arizona, where undergraduates and graduates can formulate their own degree plan based on their interests. Students can choose classes on subjects including the history of conflict in the Southwest, the political economy of the border region and Chicano studies, as well as a number of other classes that fit their degree, with the help of faculty and mentors. Prescott College also has a more structured curriculum in its Social Justice and Human Rights Resident Master of Arts Program, where students get the opportunity to travel along the border with faculty for three weeks, meeting with immigration officials, human rights advocates and Border Patrol officers, and visiting an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility. The college also offers a limited residency graduate program, in which students stay immersed in their communities of interest and form a curriculum for themselves, while frequently visiting the campus and their mentors.

California

The University of San Francisco's master's in migration studies gives students an opportunity to get hands-on experience by conducting fieldwork and attending research seminars. Students enrolled in the two-year program spend their first semester at the University of San Francisco, and their second semester at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, where they study migratory mobility as well as other core topics and attend a research seminar. All courses are taught in English. The program also offers opportunities at affiliate campuses around the world, including in Central America. Students can take courses on public policy and the social implications of migration, on identity and more to prepare for careers in non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, local, state and national government agencies, and policy and planning firms.

Los Angeles County in California has the largest number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., bringing the conversation of local immigration issues front and center. University of California, Los Angeles School of Law offers an Immigration Studies Program for those wanting to learn more about marginalized immigrants in their community. Students take part in law clinics, attend lectures by leaders in immigration studies, and take courses in subjects such as immigration law, political crimes and legal asylum, political asylum and more. In addition to classes and clinics, the school hosts student organizations like the American Constitution Society, National Lawyers Guild and El Centro Legal Clinics, a group of volunteer legal aid clinics in L.A. The topics in the El Centro Legal Clinics are wide-ranging, including youth deportation, homelessness prevention, labor and economic justice, and landlord-tenant clinics.

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Prescott College's Small Scale Agriculture class visits Tierra Y Libertad, an urban agriculture-centered anti-racist community organization in Tucson, Arizona, to learn about supporting immigrant rights, building Latino political power, and sustainable infrastructure, above. Below, the class works with a women's agricultural collective, DouglaPrieta Trabajan, and learns about community organizing in the borderlands. COURTESY ZOE HAMMER/PRESCOTT COLLEGE

Continued from previous page

For students in the immigration studies program, a postgraduate public service fellowship program is available to further their experience in the field.

Also located in Los Angeles is the University of Southern California and its Center for the Study of Immigration Integration (CSII). According to CSII, one-third of Los Angeles County residents are immigrants, and nearly half of the workforce is foreign-born. CSII researches the relationship and "mutual benefits" that exist for immigrants and the communities they live in. Integration has long been a sticking point in the conversation about immigration. How do immigrants settle in their new communities? How much do they absorb from their new country, and how much is left in their old one? According to its website, CSII "defines immigrant integration as improved economic mobility for, enhanced civic participation by, and receiving society openness to immigrants." The institute also employs research assistants and features research projects and policy briefs by undergraduates, graduates and doctoral students in USC as part of the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

Just 30 miles from the Mexico border is the University of California, San Diego, a hub of conversation about immigration issues. UC San Diego's Center for Comparative Immigration Studies has been researching immigration since 1999, and now has research associates in 25 different countries. The center runs programs for students at different levels of higher education: a master's program in Latin American Studies with a focus on international migration, an undergraduate minor program in international migration studies, and field research through the Mexican Migration Field Research program, which takes students to Mexico for field research and publishes their findings. The center also hosts fellowships for students of migration studies through the California Immigration Research Initiative. The program accepts four graduate students a year and allows them to research immigration at any University of California campus. The center also partners with the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, which offers fellowships for doctoral candidates working on dissertations. The program looks for research focused on public policy and Mexico, as well as relations between the U.S. and Mexico.

South of Los Angeles in Irvine is the Center for Research on International Migration, part of the University of California, Irvine. While the center looks at international migration and policy-based research, its main focus is on U.S. immigration through interdisciplinary studies in sociology, law and policy, political science, economics, public health and more. Also at UCI, for undergraduates and graduates, is the Chicano/Latino studies program, which offers a bachelors of arts degree, a minor, a certificate program and a graduate emphasis. The program also allows for honors studies, starting in the senior year of a student's time in the program. Among the many classes offered are community politics, U.S. Latino literature and cultures, and race and ethnicity in political science. The program also encourages students to study abroad and do internships with health, law and policy organizations during their time at UCI.

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Contra-Tiempo, an Urban Latin Dance Company, performed at an event hosted by the Center for the Study of Immigration Integration at the University of Southern California. The event focused on building a civil society by exploring cultural differences through dialogue and the arts.
KERVILLE COSMO JACK/ CONTRA-TIEMPO

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Colorado

At Colorado College in Colorado Springs, the study of race, ethnicity and migration is deemed an essential part of liberal arts. The Race, Ethnicity and Migration Studies program analyzes how "processes like colonization, migration, diaspora and displacement" have come to affect conversations around migration today. The migration studies program casts a wide net, with courses covering countries in francophone Africa and Asian studies, as well as at-home issues like immigration on the U.S.-Mexico border and immigrant communities in Colorado. The program also offers related subjects like social movements, philosophy and race, and gender in America from colonial times to 1920. Additional topics cover anthropology, ethnicity, feminism, religion, English and sociology. Colorado College just added the option to major in the migration studies program in June 2016.

New Mexico

The University of New Mexico in Albuquerque has Chicana/o studies for undergraduates interested in either major or minor programs, certificate programs and research opportunities. The program also has a student organization that seeks to "bridge the gaps" between the university's various ethnic studies groups, with undergraduates serving as representatives of their programs. Students enrolled in the program will understand the intersectional nature of Chicana/o studies by the end of the program, which covers a broad range of related courses, such as arts and culture, Chicana feminism, transnational U.S.-Mexico experience, gender and sexuality, focusing on New Mexico, the Southwest region and Mexico. They also offer an online degree program in Chicana/o Studies.

Washington

The University of Washington's Immigration Law Clinic gives law students hands-on experience with legal defense for immigrant families. Students receive supervision from a mentor from the law school faculty. Seminars are available for students on political asylum cases, representing people facing deportation, and other skills. The clinic is only open to students in their second and third years of law school, and just six to eight students will be accepted. The law clinic in Seattle works in conjunction with the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, which works with immigrants on legal cases, especially refugees and low-income immigrants. □

Irene Vasquez, director of the Chicana/o Studies program at the University of New Mexico, discusses the richness and complexity of the Mexican-American population.
AARON HILF/UNM

Shells, marbles and stones decorate a cross, like a rosary. A tomb built from piled rocks, right.
FROM EN RECUERDO DE BY PERMISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS; © 2014 BRUCE F. JORDAN

EN RECUERDO DE: THE DYING ART OF MEXICAN CEMETERIES IN THE SOUTHWEST
By Bruce F. Jordan, with essays by Martina Will de Chaparro and Tony Mares
176 pages, hardcover. $29.95. University of Nebraska Press, 2014

Some of the gravestones are crumbling. Some are illegible. All are imperfect. The camposantos, or Mexican cemeteries of the Southwest, get a close look in *En Recuerdo de*, Bruce F. Jordan's collection of black-and-white photographs. Jordan documents a fading culture of cemetery craftsmanship, traveling through Texas, New Mexico and southern Colorado to capture the spirit of the old Mexican graveyards. Within the pages of *En Recuerdo de*, which means "in memory of," Jordan wonders about the lives of the deceased and their families.

The book draws links between the homogenization of cultures and the way this shift is expressed in the concept of the afterlife. Increasingly, Jordan writes, the once deeply personal cemeteries with their hand-hewn gravestones are becoming "characterless granite." The photos, dark and full of shadows, highlight the drama of graveyards. The few light-colored objects — statues of the Virgin Mary, flowers, a pair of children's shoes — stand out sharply, an offering from the living in memory of the dead. **ANNA V. SMITH**

Marijuana stuffed in a bicycle tire. U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

A bra found on the migration route along the Mexico-U.S. border, indicating sexual assault. ENCARNI PINDADO

A migrant's feet after he walked for days through the Arizona desert. LOUIE PALU/ZUMA PRESS

Border Triptych

BY EDUARDO C. CORRAL

For the past fifteen years, six days a week, at half past eight,
Jorge has biked into my checkpoint station. He hawks
over his papers, allows me to examine his lunch box,
& then wheels off to his twelve hour shift at the pallet & crate

factory. I'm close to madness. I suspect
he's been smuggling contraband, prescription or illegal.
He sports new toupees under a cap depicting an eagle
devouring a snake. He rides spit-shined bikes that I inspect

by taking them apart, checking inside the hollow
pipes, sometimes slicing open the tires, but so far, nothing.
Jorge always remains calm, & doesn't say a damn thing.
Yesterday, a few days from my retirement, I swallowed

my pride, & swore, if he told me the truth, to keep my lips tight.
The bastard smiled, & casually replied, I smuggle bikes.

INS transcript, Sofia: I kept my mother's advice
to myself. Before crossing the Tijuana/San Diego border,
in a bathroom stall, I sprinkled gelatin powder
on my underwear. We slipped through a fence like mice

& waited in a neighborhood park. Hourly, vans
arrived, & we were packed in, driven up river-wide asphalt
toward families, jobs. Sweat soaked our clothes, salted
our skin. Suddenly we stopped on an isolated road. Bandits

stepped from the trees. The men were forced face down
in a ravine. The women were ordered to undress at gunpoint.
I unbuckled my belt, lowered my jeans. Sweat,
gelatin powder had stained my underwear a reddish brown.

I was one of ten women. Our mouths were taped.
I was spit on. I was slapped. The other women were raped.

Sapo & I wait for the cool of night under mesquite.
Three days in the desert & we're still too close to Mexico,
still so far from God. Sapo's lips so dry he swabs the pus leaking
from the ampollas on his toes across his mouth. I flip a peso.

Heads: we continue. Tails: we walk toward the highway,
thumb our way back to Nogales. The peso disappears into a nest
but the hard-on in Sapo's jeans, slightly curved, points west.
I catch a cascabel & strip off its meat. Sapo mutters, No que no güey.

I bury its forked tongue: for one night our names won't flower
in the devil's throat. We're Indios but no grin-
go will mistake us for Navajos. Above us an owl grins
like Cantinflas. The arms of the saguaros strike down the hours

but the sun refuses to set. Sapo shits behind a cluster of nopales,
& shouts out our favorite joke, No tengo papeles!

for Gloria Anzaldúa

When in Those Countries Now Desert

FEATURE BY MAYA KAPOOR

***Aedes aegypti* mosquito sucking through human skin.**
CHFONK/DREAMSTIME.COM

I moved into my Tucson, Arizona, apartment at the start of a sputtering monsoon during which the skies binge-rained, hard, about once a week or so. For short bursts the roads, sidewalks and sometimes even the wash flowed with water that broke the summer's terrible heat, conjuring vegetable plots and garden parties, inspiring me to plant.

After less than a week, I abandoned my ambitions to the mosquitoes. I ran the swamp cooler instead and watched the dawn through dusty windows. But no matter where I went, the mosquitoes followed, even into the shower. A dark mosquito with feathery antennae and silvery markings, *Aedes aegypti* is delicate, tentative, its long legs striped black and silvery, its black body spotted white. *Aedes aegypti* is skittish and fast. I never successfully swatted one, although I did smack myself in the face trying. That was why I hadn't wanted roommates: so that I could write in peace.

In Tucson, an arid place, the ubiquity of backyard mosquitoes can surprise newcomers who have not learned the city's ecology. Here in the Borderlands, human history — some human history, anyway — can be everywhere and nowhere at once, shaping the land but erased from memory. But current ecology bears witness to the past, even in the form of bloodthirsty insects. *Aedes aegypti,* those tiny torments, thrive anywhere they find water: in the detritus of pool parties; road trash; stomping puddles; effusive gardening intentions. In Tucson, *Aedes aegypti* tell stories revealing that the most persistent-seeming boundaries — between urban and wild; trammeled and not; between bodies, countries, continents — are permeable after all.

In May, Kasey Ernst, an infectious disease epidemiologist from the University of Arizona, traveled from Tucson to testify before Congress about Zika. Ernst investigates connections between mosquito-borne diseases and the environment. A clear-eyed researcher of arboviruses, Ernst explains statistical software to jumpy undergraduates in her office as patiently as she summarizes national contagious disease predictions for House Republicans.

Beginning with the mosquito's appearance in North America — it was here by the 1640s, judging by yellow fever epidemics — Ernst led members of Congress through the current state of knowledge regarding *Aedes aegypti* and the potential for Zika outbreaks.

Insect, virus and human form a complex relationship triangle. Ernst described the unanswered questions residing at the triangle's center. Was vertical transmission, where infected female mosquitoes pass Zika directly to their offspring, occurring? Scientists had found an infected male mosquito. But males do not eat blood, which suggests vertical transmission. Once the virus showed up in a new place, it potentially could stick around from year to year.

Scientists also lacked basic information about *Aedes aegypti*, such as the mosquito's exact range in North America. Ernst explained that different human communities surveyed differently for *Aedes*. Many communities didn't have the resources to survey for mosquitoes at all, much less invest in control. In the U.S.-Mexico border region where she lived, the same personnel often handled mosquito control, restaurant inspections, pest abatement and other environmental health hazards.

One thing was clear, though. "This mosquito exploits the ways we have changed our environment," Ernst said.

For all their slapping, slathering, baiting, scratching or fleeing, humans beckon *Aedes aegypti*. The tangled history of human and mosquito cannot be unknotted. Certainly not from the mosquito's perspective: On ship or on land, in canopy or clearing, the mosquitoes that feed and reproduce pass on their genes. Human behavior has selected for the insects most suited to urban landscapes. To an individual mosquito, jungle, desert or city are meaningless categories. We, their food sources, inflect these connections with cultural meaning, drawing conclusions about the world from a mosquito's bite.

THE SHARED LIVES OF INSECT AND MAMMAL are essential to the mosquito's survival and disease transmission. This lesson has taken centuries to learn. One of the first scientists to study *Aedes aegypti* in the Americas was Prussian explorer Alexander von Humboldt. In his *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America During the Years 1799-1804*, *Volume 2*, is a section entitled "Plague of Mosquitoes." Subheadings include "Intensity of the Plague," "Their Voracity in Certain Places," "Effects of the Mosquito-Sting" and "Absence of Any Remedy."

Humboldt did not know that one of the mosquito species plaguing South America while he explored the continent, robbing him of sleep and possibly some measure of sanity, was *Aedes aegypti*. His travels to the equinoctial regions included significant detours, such as when he crossed into Brazil and found out there was a bounty for his capture by the Portuguese government, which did not want him exploring its colony. Another was when his party skipped a planned stay in a town to avoid a yellow fever outbreak.

A scientist and adventurer with windswept hair and deep blue eyes, Humboldt traveled through Latin America on foot and by boat for five years during his early 20s, ending his trip in 1804, the year Lewis and Clark began their exploration of the Western United States. Humboldt traveled the length of the Orinoco River by boat, something no other European had done. His traveling companions included a French botanist, Aimé Bonpland; their servant, whose name Humboldt recorded as José; five Indigenous crewmembers, whose names Humboldt did not record at all; and Father Zea, who had been living at an isolated mission in the jungle when they passed through.

Humboldt had an astonishing breadth of interests — on the Orinoco, he recorded everything from the elevation of equatorial mountain ranges to the taste of curare, an unbelievably toxic poison Indigenous peoples used on their arrow tips — and a masochistic dedication to the pursuit of data. According to one biographer, while studying electric eels — which can give shocks of up to 600 volts — Humboldt and Bonpland "subjected themselves to every imaginable abuse in the name of science."

Unlike his contemporaries, Humboldt was a big thinker, looking for unifying ideas to explain the natural world. One of *Personal Narrative*'s greatest fans was a teenaged Charles Darwin. Humboldt's physical feats matched his scientific endeavors: Humboldt, Bonpland and Ecuadorian scientist Carlos de Montúfar y Larrea-Zurbano — who may have been Humboldt's love interest — climbed an extinct volcano, Chimborazo, to a height above 18,000 feet, setting a world ascent record that stood for 30 years. Humboldt collected plant, insect and geological data during the ascent.

All of which is to say, Humboldt was a bit of a badass. He was fearlessly eager to explore the world, its physical patterns and biogeographical revelations.

Unfortunately for him, mosquitoes were a part of his world, their patterns a mystery he could not solve, their revelations a misery. In his *Personal Narrative*, Humboldt seems self-conscious about how his mosquito descrip-

Illustration of Alexander von Humboldt sketching during his South American travels.
PRISMA ARCHIVO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

As described by Alexander von Humboldt, mosquito-evading techniques included: burying oneself in sand; sleeping surrounded by a herd of cows; building a tree house; sleeping in the middle of waterfalls ...

tions might come off back home. "Plague of Mosquitoes," which includes a reference to Dante, does read like it's been written by someone whose voice is getting higher and higher.

"Whatever fortitude be exercised to endure pain without complaint," Humboldt writes, "whatever interest may be felt in the objects of scientific research, it is impossible not to be constantly disturbed by the mosquitos, zancudos, jejens, and tempraneros." This litany included mosquitoes, gnats and biting flies that swarmed hands and faces, bit through clothes, flew up noses and into mouths, and caused coughing and sneezing fits when people tried to speak.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s — before mosquito netting, insect repellent, screen doors or solid walls — there was no sealed-off *inside* where humans anywhere in the world could avoid pests. The missionaries and villagers Humboldt met along rivers barely slept at all, though not for lack of trying.

As described by Humboldt, mosquito-evading techniques included: burying oneself in sand; sleeping surrounded by a herd of cows; building a tree house; sleeping in the middle of waterfalls; using mosquito netting so stifling it required periodically getting up and walking around in the mosquito-infested air; and filling with smoke a room so small the occupant had to crawl into it then seal himself inside for the night. These rooms were called hornitos, or "little ovens." Humboldt helpfully informs the reader that the smell of crocodiles does not, in fact, ward off mosquitoes, as the whole time he and his party were dissecting a large crocodile the mosquitoes were relentless.

Driven perhaps by his desperation to get a good night's sleep, Humboldt sought patterns in the presence or absence of mosquitoes and other insects, suggesting everything from the color of river water to insect exhaustion as possible explanations. Naturally, Humboldt correlated an abundance of mosquitoes with a decline in quality of life for humans, describing unrelenting flying insects that made the places he explored "almost uninhabitable."

If mosquitoes made a place uninhabitable for humans, then perhaps building towns and homes would make a place uninhabitable to mosquitoes. Humboldt hypothesized that forest destruction reduced mosquito populations, and that towns with overgrown lawns and squares had worse mosquito problems. Orderliness was the solution, Humboldt concluded: "The insects will diminish when the old trees of the forest have disappeared; when in those countries now desert, the rivers are seen bordered with cottages, and the plains covered with pastures and harvests."

What Humboldt didn't realize was that changes of the kind he envisioned — from uncultivated jungle to towns and farms, from tribal land to European missions — brought unanticipated dangers of their own. That what appeared to be the creation of order from chaos — carving European towns from South American tropical forest — was actually a disruption of social and ecological systems that would cause new health threats, including the spread of insects and the diseases they carried. Not that he knew what diseases were or that insects could carry them. Humboldt explored the Orinoco five years before Charles Darwin was born. Without the framework of evolution, he had no concept that human behavior could shape an insect species. Like his contemporaries, Humboldt thought mosquitoes and diseases came from "miasmas" — bad air.

Humboldt and his contemporaries didn't see the connection

between global travel, colonialism and mosquito spread — much less disease spread. Humboldt chalked up tropical fevers to heat, vapors, bad air and other inanimate, locally occurring causes: to things that were part of the land, not to something that might have been brought to the land at the same time as millions of enslaved humans. Not to something new. And certainly not to something alive.

***AEDES AEGYPTI* EVOLVED IN WEST AFRICA** as a canopy species feeding on monkeys. When humans felled trees, mosquitoes came down to ground level and found a new host — us. *Aedes aegypti* flew out of the woods and into the garden, out of the ahistorical wild, a place expected never to change, and into the city, a place expected never to evolve. Urban *Aedes aegypti* have evolved into a separate subspecies.

An urbanized mosquito, *Aedes aegypti aegypti* breeds best in rainwater collected in human-made containers: garden embellishments, bits of trash, empty cans, rainwater-harvesting systems. It doesn't live much further than a third of a mile from human homes. In addition to being hard for humans to hear, the species feeds in places hard to swat — inside elbows, around ankles, backs of knees. Given a choice between cow and person, *Aedes aegypti* will feed on the person.

The optimistically named *Mosquitoes and Their Control* explains that mosquitoes "are found throughout the world, except in deserts and permanently frozen areas." Geographer Melinda Butterworth pointed out to me that, on a yard-by-yard scale, Tucson is not a desert. In a well-shaded yard, where temperatures drop by as much as 10 degrees and rainwater lingers in old flowerpots, mosquitoes thrive.

WITHOUT A CONCEPT OF VIROLOGY, Humboldt could not understand acquired immunity, much less arboviruses. Europeans who came to South America developed terrible inflammations from insect bites, while the resident "copper-colored man," Humboldt wrote, did not. Humboldt ascribed the difference in health to some inherent racial difference. He suggested that mosquito venom could be used as a litmus test to identify "creole whites" who looked European. Based on his observations, Humboldt believed that "Indians, and in general all the people of color, at the moment of being stung, suffer like the whites, although perhaps with less intensity of pain."

My first response to these thoughts was to mutter something along the lines of maybe-you-just-complain-more-about-the-intensity-of-pain, as though I could pick a race fight with the dead father of the field of biogeography. I reminded myself that he lived in a time when scientists — white men of the leisure class, primarily — tried to make sense of the world by measuring and mapping skulls. It pains me to report that Humboldt and Bonpland raided Native graves, stealing entire skeletons of children as well as assorted skulls to help with these studies, despite the anger of their Indian guides.

Many of the adult "copper-colored" people Humboldt met in South America must have fallen sick with yellow fever and other tropical illnesses during childhood, and so they had acquired immunity: It was vaccination the hard way. Later infections for survivors really were milder. As more members of a community acquired immunity, fewer unexposed people were likely to fall ill because the reservoir of disease carriers shrank, a concept we call herd immunity these days. Humboldt's European acquaintances' first experiences of tropical illnesses were sure to be severe. Humboldt didn't realize that countless Indigenous peoples died when mosquitoes, including *Aedes aegypti*, first made landfall.

THE INTERTWINED HUMAN-MOSQUITO ECOLOGY first went global four centuries ago when humans set off in tall ships, taking casks of water infested with mosquito larvae and cargoes of enslaved humans. Since then, primate and insect have remained steadfast — if unintentional — travel companions. As humans traveled the globe, *Aedes aegypti* traveled with them, and centers for human settlement with warm-enough winters became centers for *Aedes aegypti*, as well. Today, *Aedes aegypti* continues to be a great traveling companion: It thrives in the tropics, but its eggs can survive drying out for up to a year. Genetic studies show that *Aedes aegypti* in the Southwest Borderlands has close relatives both in coastal Mexico and on the East Coast of the United States. Researchers believe that mosquitoes travel in the Southwest as passengers along highways.

There were several *Aedes*-free decades in the Borderlands: A brief DDT-derived respite, after which an entomologist observed what turned out to be *Aedes aegypti* snacking on her ankles in a Tucson backyard in the mid-1990s. The mosquitoes that feast on me in my garden most likely descended from ancestors who rode into an overland port of entry from Mexico in a shipping truck.

In the Borderlands today, the frame for arboviruses is globalization, with the twist of climate change. Ernst expects chikungunya, an arbovirus that has appeared in Florida, to arrive in Arizona eventually. According to Ernst's research, while the arbovirus dengue has not yet been a community-wide concern in Tucson, climate change may make it one — if not by affecting mosquitoes or disease survival directly, then perhaps by influencing the ways that humans store and use water, altering the world from a mosquito's perspective. When Ernst conducted interviews in the U.S.-Mexico border region to study residents' understanding of dengue and its spread, some respondents mentioned miasmas.

Potted plants in a Tucson garden — where *Aedes aegypti* and other mosquitoes can thrive. ARIZONA NEWS SERVICE

When I thought I might be approaching Humboldtian levels of mosquito misery, unable to sleep through the night because of waking up to probiscidal poking at my eyebrows in the morning, I did what Humboldt never would have: I ran. More precisely, I flew, to visit family back east.

Sometimes, I believe in Humboldt's answer to mosquitoes: the right way of living. If only my apartment had tight window screens and air conditioning; if I had neighbors who xeriscaped instead of growing exuberantly watered vegetable gardens; if Tucson's roads drained rainwater instead of flooding — then I would be free of my tiny pests. And on a very small local scale, for at least a short while, I probably would.

But then I catch myself. Like Humboldt, I've imagined that I could build away from something that loves built environments; that I could disrupt something that thrives on disturbance. Meanwhile, I'd given no thought to living lushly in a desert — with swimming pools, long flights, globally shipped goods — no thought at all to the rhythms, structures, aspirations of a life holding every door open to mosquitoes. □

▼ **Aqueduct in Chihuahua, Mexico, c. 1904.**
DEGOLYER LIBRARY, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

▶ **Irrigation in Zacatecas, Mexico, c. 1900.**
MARY AGNES CHASE PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM 1898-1903, SMITHOSIONIAN INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

The Afterlife of Cotton

FEATURE BY CRISTINA RIVERA GARZA

1.
Between 2010 and 2012, the Zetas cartel turned the Piedras Negras prison into a factory of uniforms, bulletproof jackets and desaparecidos, the Mexican journalist Diego Osorno claimed, not too long ago.[ii] Near Piedras Negras, in the norteño state of Coahuila, lies the Don Martin Dam. The Zetas transformed it into an underwater narco-grave. Constructions are haunted spaces, anthropologist Saiba Varma once said in an animated talk about infrastructures. There are soft infrastructures, like hospitals and factories, and hard ones, like highways and bridges. Like dams. Hard, indeed. *The dam is an amphitheater, solemn and noble*. You can't forget the bodies that constructed them, insisted Varma. Nor those that died there. You can't forget, she kept on insisting. There is an underwater mass grave in the middle of the desert, near the Mexico-U.S. border. I insist.

2.
Construction on the Don Martin Dam officially began in January 1927 — only 10 years after the drafting of the Mexican Constitution officially ended the armed phase of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Located in the Juárez municipality in the northernmost corner of the state of Coahuila, very close to the border with the United States, the dam came to occupy the riverbed between the Salado and the Sabinas rivers, right in the midst of a ranch owned by one Martín Guajardo, hence its name. Engineers hired by the post-revolutionary regime believed that, with a reservoir of 1.13 million acre-feet of water, the Don Martin could irrigate some 73,155 acres of land, amending the ways of a climate always harsh and a sky determined to hold back rain. No clouds. No shade. No mercy. The dam was to turn vast tracts of land perceived as useless into veritable fields of agricultural production, or so voiced the engineers, the federal authorities, and the wandering farmers in constant lookout for a place to settle.

3.
In the beginning was water, and water was with the dam. *The magic gift of the water with its secret drops of light, its hidden stars*.

Water, however miraculous, was not enough. It never was or is. If farmers were to settle this zone and laborers to come by the hundreds, they needed more. They needed lands, and titles for those lands, as well as credit with which to acquire tools and seeds. Knowing better, the post-revolutionary cadre proceeded to open up the legal channels to facilitate both. Honoring the Colonization Law of 1926, the federal government began the land-distribution process around the Don Martin dam, establishing Irrigation District Number 4. Instead of ejidos — community-owned land recognized by the 1917 Constitution — however, the Mexican government supported an agrarian reform based on the distribution of small holdings of private property. They favored colonists, those members of an emerging middle class among farmers, over ejidatarios, peasants tied to communally based production, which, in their view, arrested the incursions of modernization in the northern fields.

Becoming a colonist, however, was not easy. Each potential colonist had to provide a down payment, 5 percent of the cost of the land, never a small feat for landless, unemployed and nomadic workers. And yet, the population of Estación Camarón, a campsite first developed in 1882, soon multiplied, thanks to the construction works of the Mexico-Laredo railroad in the neighboring state of Nuevo Leon. News of the land distribution and availability of credit from the Banco Agrícola quickly reached the sensitive ears of deportees from the United States and repatriated workers already living in Mexico, many of them experienced cotton pickers of southern Texas ranches. Agricultural laborers and landless peasants from southern Mexico also swarmed to the banks of saltpeter rivers, looking for a better life — a place they could call theirs.

That's how my grandparents — an errant mine worker from San Luis Potosí who married a much younger woman who knew

Workers harvesting cotton in Torreón, Mexico (date unknown).

EUGENE V. HARRIS, CLARENCE W. SORENSEN COLLECTION, AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE LIBRARIES, THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

Through the ruins of a border town with Mexican literary legend José Revueltas[i]

how to read and write — came to the region: Looking for land they could work and own, looking for their first real home. José María Rivera Doñes. Petra Peña. They had heard, like many others, of the promises of the Agrarian Reform and, although incredulous and mistrustful, they came. They had nothing to lose. They had land, and a new life, to gain.

4.

But true stories are not to be told. True stories live before articulation and beyond hurt. They linger and survive precisely because they are hardly told — a gasp, the proverbial foot in the mouth, the slippage of drunkards. Or else because they are shared only in little pieces, filaments, sharp splinters flying through time. My family never sat down to talk about this. This story of cotton and work on the threshold of the desert was never intended to be known in that way — a foundational legacy, a well-structured source of pride, or a set of sentimental lessons for the future. Every now and then, at times by mistake, my father would say something over dinner, to which my mother would react, albeit briefly. A wince. A hint of a smile. The eyelid, when it closes down. Every now and then, at the end of a party, among alcohol-induced disorderly confessions, an uncle would say something, to which an aunt would retort, in code. No more comments added. As if protecting the rest of us — the younger ones already born in cities, far away from cotton fields — from that knowledge; or rather, as if protecting that knowledge from us.

We were at war, and in different armies. They knew that truth ought to be withheld from the enemy. Modernization was the name of this war. In its midst, our parents and grandparents lovingly looked at us as we ate or ran errands and they knew it: Upwardly mobile children would betray them. Parents who worked hard for their children would see in time how these same children, these apparently innocent children, would give them away.

They knew we'd leave the fields, this way of life, to become strangers or, worse, naive, perhaps even well-meaning, adversaries.

So hush.

True stories may only be told within other stories, and then only obliquely.

5.

A historic harvest of cotton in 1932 settled the question: The lands watered by the Don Martin Dam were to become cotton fields. The machinery of the state turned its wheels soon afterwards, striking deals with U.S. investors and employing the full power of the nascent post-revolutionary regime to break up long-held large estates. Cotton soon dominated the horizon in Mexicali, Baja California; in Delicias, Chihuahua; and in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Some of the arriving cotton pickers were lucky. They got their acres of land and settled in, leaving their nomadic mores behind. Some had to try harder, and while waiting for an opportunity hired themselves as farmhands, creating a new, and eventually conflicting, hierarchy in the cotton fields. The latent antagonism must have been felt in the wind, wind from the north, as it battered the tents in the campsite. Pieces of ephemeral architecture. The night vault pierced by the light of a thousand stars.

The cotton fields dreamt of cities and, soon, cities emerged out of the *white*. Designed by engineers to ease the flow of goods, these cities materialized the dreams Jorge Luis Borges had not yet dreamt: circular ruins. On May 5, 1933, colonists around the Don Martin Dam founded Anáhuac City, with total support from both the federal government and the National Commission of Irrigation, in lands overlapping with Estación Camarón and, on the other side of the tracks, Estación Rodríguez. There are few things sadder than the remnants of sudden and ephemeral opulence. Concentric, ample avenues envelop rounded plazas in whose centers once rose the legendary obelisk indicating the four cardinal corners of the world and the three vectors of time: past, present, future. The future above all.

FOOTNOTES

i. Based on documents found at the Archivo Histórico de Nuevo León, located in Monterrey, Nuevo León, México. Roadtrip with Claudia Sorais Castañeda. Phrases in italics belong to José Revueltas. *Human Mourning* in translation by Aviva Kana with Suzanne Jill Levine. Some sections of this text were written originally in English, while some others were translated from Spanish into English by myself, and still others by Aviva Kana with Suzanne Jill Levine.

ii. Diego Enrique Osorno, "En Piedras Negras un penal se transformó en campo de exterminio," *Vanguardia*, Feb. 11, 2016.

The letter "Z" (for Zetas drug cartel) is seen painted on a hill next to the toll booth at the freeway between Monterrey and Torreón, in the Mexican state of Coahuila. 2010.
TOMAS BRAVO/REUTERS

José Revueltas came by horse to Estación Camarón in 1934. It was late March.

"The land in the north is whitish and hurtful," he wrote in a letter he sent to his family in Mexico City while he remained in norteño lands. "Plains and deserts yet untamed, fierce, brimming with wild shrubs and sandpaper trees, with cactus that torment, torture our flesh, a symbol of all the Mexican land, Indian and in pain. Wild, wild is the wind, with no belay. Wind from the north." [iii]

As he rode, Revueltas must have thought about the farmworkers' strike he had heard about and immediately longed to join. The wild wind from the north, swirling around his head. The acacias. He was 19 years old. The sandpaper trees. You could see all of it from the window of our rental car: the shrubbery and the wind and the light like a dagger and Revueltas' relentless gallop.

6.
This is what it's all about: following in your footsteps 82 years later, comrade. You had not yet written, much less published, the novels and short stories that gained you a reputation as a revolutionary writer. You had not yet been a member of, and had not been expelled from, the ranks of the Mexican Communist Party. You had not become a detainee at the Islas Marias federal prison or, years later, after hundred of students were killed in the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, at the Lecumberri jail.

Two women follow in your footsteps, retracing them, to find you or to lose you. Forever.

A car. A lonely highway through the desert threshold. A small story of climate change.

7.
In the beginning was unrest, unrest with the meek, who would inherit the earth.

Outside the full control of the post-revolutionary state, the land around the Don Martin Dam had been an ambiguously defined zone. Properly known as a steppe, but described by locals as a desert, it became a priority in the agenda of president Lázaro Cardenas — a champion of Agrarian Reform and labor organizing between 1934 and 1940 — as he tried to establish a clear border with the United States while taking back the autonomy of the region. There, those 15 hectares per family or that loan from the Banco de Crédito Ejidal were meant to uphold the fringes of the Mexican nation. A matter of national identity and national security, nothing more and nothing less. Impossible to walk through Anáhuac City without thinking about José María Rivera Doñes, picking cotton and taking his time every now and then to have a smoke. Impossible to walk through Anáhuac City without making out the figure of Petra Peña, working and giving birth to a child who would die in a year, and giving birth to my father afterwards. Impossible to walk through Anáhuac City without mulling over cotton and the Don Martin Dam, and those men and women looking into each other's eyes.

This is the moment I believe in: José Revueltas meets the eyes of José María and Petra over a cotton field in the midst of a strike.

There are moments that reverberate over the earth. And they stretch. Until they catch us. On a highway.

8.
Revueltas explored much of his key experience in Estación Camarón in *El luto humano*, his second novel, which was published in 1943 and translated into English twice.[iv] The agrarian experiment has already failed when the novel opens: A small group of impoverished peasants witnesses the death of a child, and death — the presence of death, the bitterness of death, the sweetness of death — impregnates their surroundings. Repeated flashbacks let the reader see and feel the cotton fields, especially the labor that transformed tracts of dry land into meadows of white gold.

Revueltas did not miss the buzzing of tractors or the dignified demeanor of strikers as they quietly sang a melody while blocking the waterways. He documented the farmworkers' demands for fair wages and fulfillment of those promises of landownership. Urgent telegrams exchanged between local and federal authorities and, later, between unions and other leftist

FOOTNOTES

iii. José Revueltas, "Sabinas Hidalgo," in *Las evocaciones requeridas I, Obras Completas* (México: Era, 1987), 63.

iv. José Revueltas, *The Stone Knife*, translated by R.H. Hays (New York: Reynal and Hitchcok, 1947); *Human Mourning*, translated by Roberto Crespi (University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

v. Eyal Weizman, "The Desert Threshold: George Prochnik Interviews Eyal Weizman," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Oct. 18, 2015.

Women take part in a search for missing relatives near the village of La Union on the outskirts of Torreón in the Mexican state of Coahuilla. The Zetas cartel, which arrived here in 2007, has made Torreón one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico.
DANIEL BECERRIL /REUTERS

organizations and the government itself, not only confirmed Revueltas' participation in the strike, but also showed the lively nature of rural communism in northern Mexico and its volatile, conflictive relationship with the state. Using two or three adjectives in a row, and more if the situation called for it, Revueltas made patent the individual and social drama triggered by cotton as it established a paradoxical yet utterly productive alliance with the post-revolutionary regime. For cotton is generous, and cruel. Cotton is cruel.

9.
Cotton has been as fundamental in the north of Mexico as corn in the center and south of the country. Many norteño cities are, in fact, the offspring of cotton. Both the drastic demographic increase and the remarkable economic growth of northern Mexico are historically related to the expansion of cotton fields. As much as in the American South, cotton marked the economy, the landscape, and the social mores of the Mexican side, albeit in very different ways. Rather than producing plantations based on slave labor, norteño cotton, distributed in small private landholdings under the supervision of the state, meant both social mobility and adherence to the post-revolutionary regime. Resilience, resourcefulness and hard work, characteristics norteños are prone to associate with themselves, all appear in the ways in which farmers first approached the state, often instigating agrarian reform initiatives rather than merely responding to them. Indeed, even though cotton production was state-controlled along the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border, collaborative work practices generated by communities themselves, as well as a deep attachment to the land, were central to the high yields of those early cotton harvests.

But as forensic architect Eyal Weizman has argued, "shifting the climatic threshold is also shifting the 'nomos of the earth.' "[v] As the colonization project evolved, the land, exhausted by monoculture, eventually gave up. By the 1960s, soil erosion, excessive use of fertilizers, and a range of invincible plagues had brought the cotton experiment to a trepid end. Sorghum replaced cotton, then maquiladoras replaced sorghum, in rapid succession.

And then drug trafficking. And now pure violence. Numbers tell a terrifying story: About 80,000 desaparecidos nationwide in 15 years of the so-called War on Drugs. Many of them in the same lands where cotton once bloomed.

You can't forget those that die here, Varma, the anthropologist, had told us in a conference far away. Infrastructures are sacred spaces, she insisted. There are bodies under the water. There are rotting bodies under the water. A dam.

10.
Living only by a miracle is what we do here, says the man who guides us towards the center of the plaza of Anáhuac City. One step. Another step. *A foot doesn't walk alone, it joins other feet.* … No one remembers anymore, he says when the question is about cotton. Plough. Sow. Water. Weed. Harvest. What is that all about? The man smiles when he points out the dam in the photographs hanging from the green walls of the library. *The dam is an amphitheater, solemn and noble*. In *Human Mourning*, cement trucks *disrupt*, hammers speak *a precise language*. Everything is covered *in iron music*.

Engineers, contractors, masons, mechanics, carpenters, they fill everything with an intense, vibrant murmur, as if it were more than a dam, as if instead of a dam, it was a statue, or something just as beautiful, chiseled to adorn the gray landscape.

Something just as beautiful.

The dam has *feet,* and a dark *skeleton.* The dam is draped in *curtains* like clothes. Full of bodies, the dam is a hyper-body now. An aquatic cemetery. A dejected Atlantis on acid.

11.
But Estación Camarón doesn't exist anymore, the man insists. Affected or delighted, it doesn't make a difference.

The strike disrupted the irrigation system ... in an instant everything died.

Estación Camarón is a pile of nothing over nothing. *A strike is at the margin of silence, but still silent.*

Rubble, that's what you'd find there. Less than rubble.

José Revueltas. GENERAL ARCHIVE OF THE NATION; BROTHERS FUND MAYO; AND EDICIONES ERA

12.
The census shows that Estación Camarón has had between 12 and three inhabitants throughout the 21st century.

The most intimate of the ruins are our bones.

13.
We got to get out of there. Out of here. The decision is made abruptly. Two stateless women, two women without an army, maybe without a country, drive back fast. We got to get out. Two women suddenly alone. Fear is a herd of wild boars that roots around on the earth's surface. Fear is in the voice, in the hands gripping the steering wheel, in the unease. A black pickup approaches in the rearview mirror. A state of emergency: the fear of being in a car on a highway that literally goes nowhere. The fear of being closely followed by history. Natividad — one of the main characters in *Human Mourning* — had a vision of everything that was to happen. Did Natividad see us then? On the trail of those that worked the fields, and joined a strike no one remembers, and then escaped? Did he see José María and Petra right when they tucked their children and belongings in a horse-drawn wagon and took the road?

14.
Natividad, José Revueltas wrote, had a vision of all this. He did. José María and Petra had a vision of this. They did. Two stateless women alone on a highway in front of an advancing army. *A surreal atmosphere, marked off and secret.* We have to get out of here. The silence of the underwater mass grave — interrupted by the delicate bubbles of the dead. □

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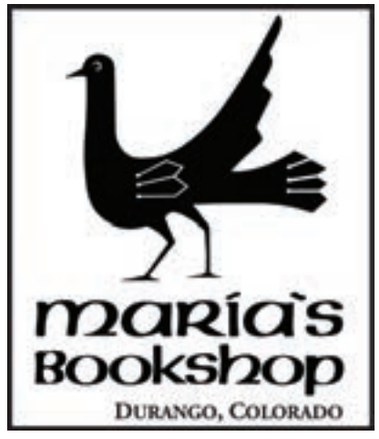

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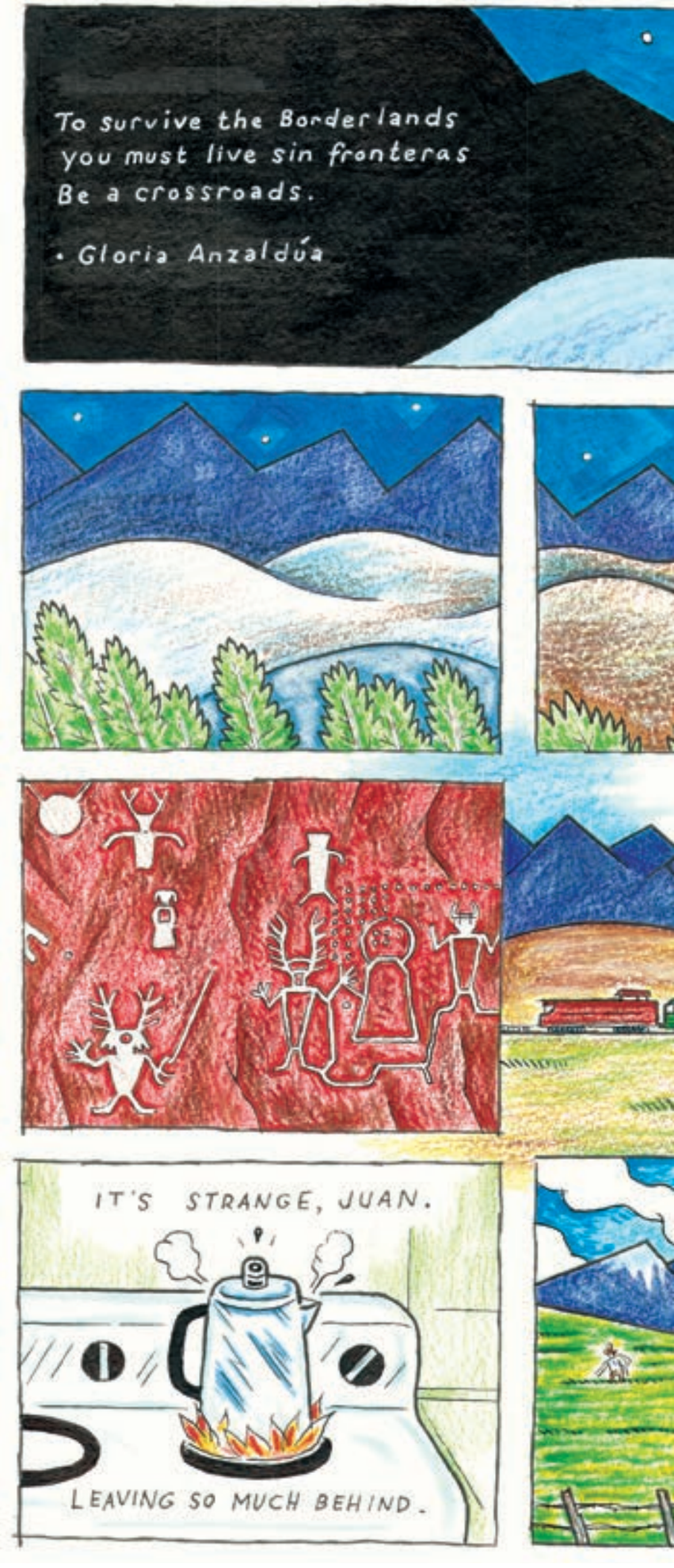
ESSAY AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY T. E. BAK

Sometimes a place



These days I travel home mostly by train, down the loamy Willamette Valley, east from the Cascades into the sylvan Sierra Nevada, across the Great Basin and over the spine of the Rockies, where boundaries of time and territory vanish. Conifer limbs heave in response to ethereal tidings of cloudburst and insolation. My grandfather has been gone for 20 years. But I find him here in the high desert.

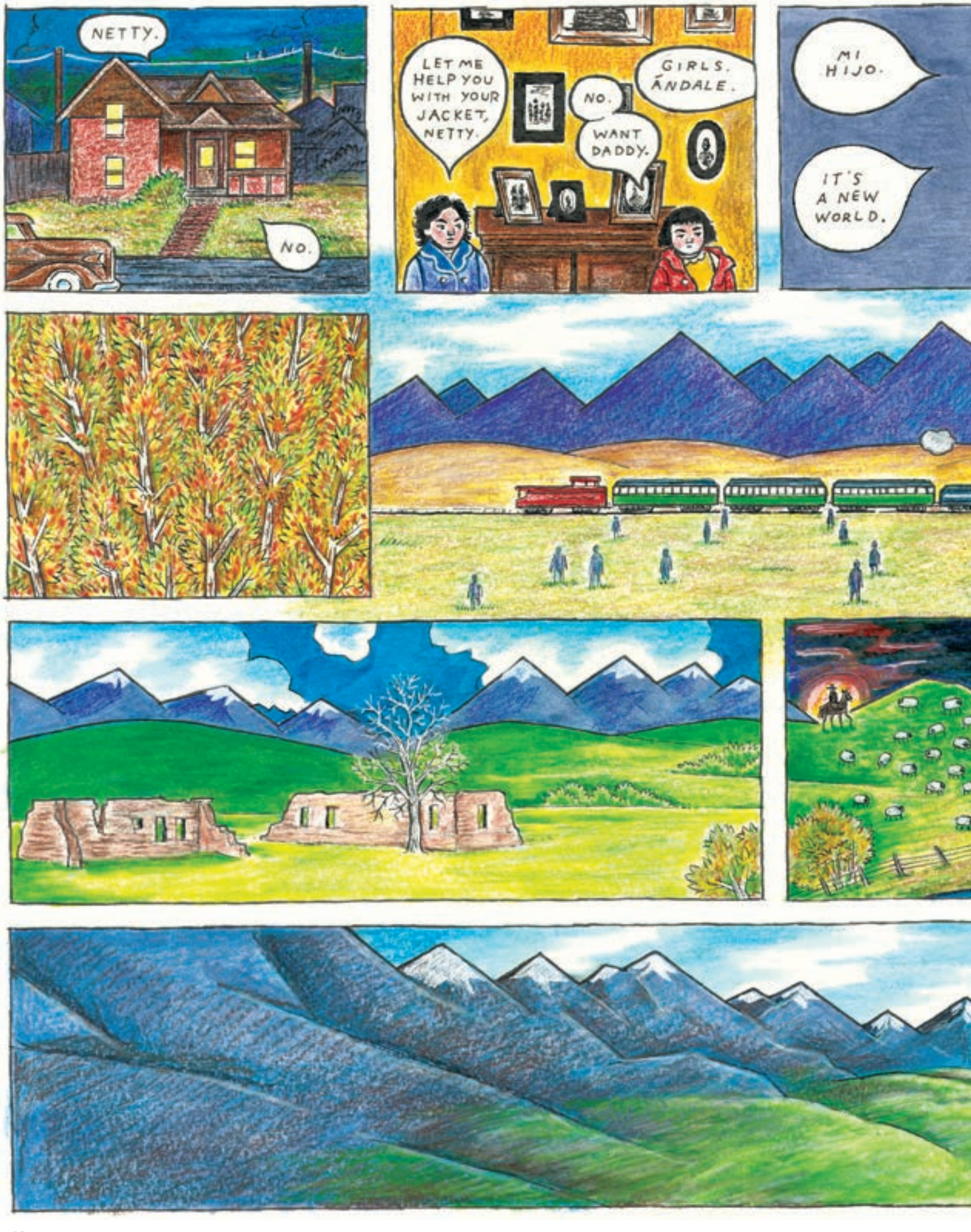
In the deep time beneath this age, there is a realm where knots of bone and sinew are bound together, forming the first human creatures. These beings scale an ancient tree into the sacred lake, Sip'ophe — the *sipapu* through which human souls drift between this sphere of reality and the gloom below, where the dead are like rain returning to a river. Tewa Pueblo Indians reveal that Sip'ophe is a brackish lake near the Great Sand Dunes of Colorado's San Luis Valley, where loose sands are swept by southwestern winds into the cradling base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Stone tools and animal bones discovered here suggest Neolithic Folsom Man pursued bison, camel and mammoth as early as 8000 B.C. Later migrating hunters of an Upper Rio Grande Culture were succeeded by the Hogan Builders, whose petroglyphs scar the volcanic cliffs of the valley's Rock Creek Canyon. By 800 A.D., trade between nomadic montane bands of Utes and agrarian Pueblos to the south was established. Hides and meat were exchanged for squash, corn and beans. Beads of turquoise extracted from deposits in the valley were either traded or sacrificed to the gods. In time, the tumbling sea delivered the conquistador and wherever the Spaniard converged with the sun god's people, blood was spilled. Some blood flowed south, some blood flowed north. The meeting of Spaniard and Indian, Octavio Paz wrote, signified "burial mound and marriage bed."

In 1758, my maternal ancestry took root in the New World with the birth of a Mexican-born Spaniard named Victoriano Trinidad Márquez. Victoriano's descendants migrated north, from Santa Eulalia, Mexico, among a group of families issued land grants by the Mexican government. In 1854, these families were led from Abiquiu, New Mexico, to the San Luis Valley. At the site of an ancient Indian village, on the north side of the Conejos River, the first permanent Conejos Grant colony, Plaza de Guadalupe, was founded.

Regional geography was complicated by the U.S.


HOW'S IT GOING IN HERE, CARRIE?
OK
YAWN
TIRED.
I'LL ROUND UP THE KIDS.
GET THAT CHIN UP, TOO.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MI HIJO.
IT'S A NEW WORLD.

government's 1868 survey of the 37th parallel, which repositioned the territorial boundary between New Mexico and Colorado until 1876, when Colorado became the 38th state. Legal quarrels ensued, brought on by greed and distrust between land developers and homesteaders over water access, mineral rights and timber usage. These sharpened divisions between the Indian, Anglo, Mexican and mestizo, between landowner, immigrant and peon.

While his younger siblings learned to read and write, my maternal great-grandfather, Ramón Gómez, studied the temperament of the San Juan Mountains, corralling his father's sheep through the range's arroyos and canyons. In 1927, Ramón married Virginia Lucero. Both their families arrived with the original Guadalupe settlers, and several of Virginia's ancestors had been traded as Indian slaves.

Ramón went wherever he could find farming work — herding sheep in the mountains, planting root vegetables, or digging ditches in the hardpan. A daughter, Carolyn, my grandmother, grateful for her high school education, spent many autumn school days churning her hands in the soil until dusk, wresting spuds and beets and cabbages from fields her father had sown.

"Sometimes we would go up into the mountains to collect firewood in a horse-drawn wagon," she says. "We didn't have a car. We didn't have money."

Carolyn worked summers at a local tourist lodge and waited tables in nearby Alamosa. After high school, she cleaned rooms and worked in the kitchen of the local hospital. In 1947, she married Juan García, a World War II veteran and nurse whose older brother was married to Carolyn's aunt.

Amid post-war economic growth, Denver, 235 miles north of the San Luis Valley, was transitioning from a sleepy cow town to a modern city. Carolyn and Juan were living in Alamosa with their three children when they decided a future in Denver looked brighter. On Labor Day morning 1951, they loaded boxes of clothing, dishes and cookware into a brown 1938 Chevrolet coupe. They took only what they could fit in the car. With their infant son and two daughters on top of blankets and pillows in the backseat, they said goodbye to the valley. My grandfather had a poor sense of direction. "He would get lost," my grandmother claims. "So over La Veta Pass and through the mountains, I was the one who drove. All the way to Denver."

I grew up speaking Spanish in a bilingual Denver public school close to my grandparents' home. My Anglo father's biology privileged me with an ambiguity of appearance that minimized encounters with the racism and bigotry I witnessed in Denver. A youthful disregard for history and ancestry provided me with the tools to construct a border against myself — a wall that separated me from an inheritance of culture and language, from the Indian, from the Mexican. Passing through the West, en route home, I wrangle with what it means to belong to the land, to be part Mexican in a country that is no longer part of Mexico. As the Hopi avow, I am related to the land. I don't really know what it feels like to be an American, either.

In a dream that follows my grandfather's death, everyone is familiar but I recognize no one. Passengers drift on and off the train as it wends through the prairie. The dream unfolds as a temporally distorted vignette, like a comic strip. My grandfather's death seems a strange plotline, half-remembered.

"Are you here, Grandfather?" I ask. "Are you on the train?" His voice resonates like an off-stage actor's: "I am on the train."

"Where does the train go?" I ask.

"It goes on," he replies. "It goes on forever." ■

U.S. $5 | Canada $6

HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

NOGALES **The day the border got erased: Artist Ana Teresa Fernández painted a section of the U.S.-Mexico border fence sky blue, making it appear as if part of the wall came down, creating a portal between the countries.** ANA TERESA FERNÁNDEZ

WYOMING

There's nothing like a rootin'-tootin' Old West-style gunfight in the street to get your heart pumping; you can root for the good cowboys, cheer on the dance-hall sweetie (secretly an armed Pinkerton detective), and jeer at the bullies who get plugged full of lead. This happens six nights a week during the summer in Cody, Wyoming, but better not stand too close. At a recent Friday night showdown, three tourists, a raft and the front of a business were all gouged by real, ricocheting fragments of bullets, fired from a Civil War-era gun. No one was seriously injured, though a Minnesota man and his 3-year-old daughter were treated at the hospital and released, and a 22-year-old New Yorker was assisted at the scene. Just for comparison, *Cody Enterprise* reporter Lew Freedman went to Jackson, Wyoming, to watch the tourist gunfight that's been held there for 60 years. The shots fired in Jackson were truly blanks, no spectators or rafts were harmed, and the best joke involved a guy named Lanky Lou, so smitten with a bar girl named Cheyenne Rose that he asked: "Can I have your telegraph number?" Meanwhile, the Cody sachems are investigating what happened and deciding how to bulletproof their gunfighters' show, which always erupts outside the historic Irma Hotel, Buffalo Bill's old hangout. At the very whisper of discontinuing the event, supporters made their opinions known to the *Cody Enterprise*. Said one reader, calling himself Fox River: "Some liberals or effeminate weaklings will start a protest and we will no longer have the gunfight. Also the rodeo will be replaced by a vegan tofu bar and Reiki therapy center." But 'taint nuthin to worry about, ma'am, as Lanky Lou might say: The gunfight and rodeo are venerable Cody institutions and likely to remain so.

WYOMING

Speaking of roadside excitement, game warden Todd Graham got a call about an unusual traffic jam near Alpine, Wyoming, south of Grand Teton National Park: A moose was giving birth to her calf right in the middle of a gravel road. "The calf was still very shaky and unable to walk," Graham said. "If a vehicle came within about 50 yards, the cow would pin her ears back and charge." So everyone waited — six vehicles on one side of the blessed event, two trucks on the other — and after an hour and a half, with wobbly steps, the calf was able to totter after its mother into a willow patch. There, Graham said, he was surprised to hear the newborn "open up with chirps and whistles." Two days later, reports *Wyoming Wildlife*, the pair had vanished into the wild.

THE WEST

In a first for the nation, nine budless marijuana plants were displayed at the Oregon State Fair in Salem. The exhibit brings pot cultivation into the agricultural mainstream less than two years after Oregon voters legalized recreational marijuana, reports the Associated Press. The plants, all judged winners in their categories — *sativa, indica* and hybrid — were housed in a translucent tent, and no one under 21 was allowed entry. And in another first for the nation, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that "wind turbine technician" is now the fastest-growing profession, with job opportunities expected to double by 2024, reports the Union of Concerned Scientists.

MONTANA

It was a thrilling sight, and we were privileged to see it: Nearly a thousand Native Americans, all wearing traditional costumes decorated with beads, feathers, elk teeth and bells, slowly circled an outdoor arena to the steady beat of six enormous drums. It took the dancers more than an hour to enter the moving circle, where hundreds of spectators stood to honor the American flag, held by a woman wearing a war bonnet, and flanked by Native American war veterans. This was the "Grand Entry" at the annual Crow Fair at Hardin, Montana, a four-day event first held in 1904. Nowadays, this get-together, complete with rodeo and various dance, singing and drumming contests, bills itself as the largest outdoor powwow in the United States, and visitors approaching it are liable to see hundreds of teepees erected on the banks of the Little Bighorn River. Not far from the Crow Fair, there's a very different tourist attraction, and we wish we'd had a day to explore it — the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, where, in 1876, George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry made their disastrous last stand.

COLORADO

Bill Knapp, a resident of Carbondale, has done Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump the dubious favor of drafting his future concession speech. Speaking for Trump in a letter to the *Post Independent*, he begins, "I congratulate myself for pulling off the most elaborate con of all time. …You seriously thought I wanted to be president? America, you are all a bunch of fools! For starters, I could not take the pay cut."

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see **hcn.org**.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos #heardaroundthewest on Instagram.

"We would rather spend our summer weekends floating currents or breathing fresh air along the banks of a free-flowing mountain stream than mowing lawns and plucking dandelions."

Mike Chiropolos, in his essay, "Rural Colorado can't afford to lose more water to Denver," from Writers on the Range, hcn.org/wotr